

The Emptiness of Judah in the Exilic and Early Persian Period

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Abstract

The Old Testament verbal expression of 'the exile of Judah' during the Babylonian exile has led to the perception that the land of Judah was emptied of all Judeans. This biblical expression is not necessarily contradictory to historical facts, but theologically and quality-orientated in nature. The exile of the elite from Jerusalem to Babylon, the execution of some of them and the flight of others to Egypt and other neighbouring states disrupted Jerusalem and rendered the city dysfunctional in every national sphere. The royal and religious services, which were based in Jerusalem, the capital city, were discontinued. The emptiness of Judah was signalled by the emptiness as regards the royal and religious authority wrought on Jerusalem by Babylon. Without their royalty, cult, trade, military and judiciary, Judah was indeed emptied and exiled. However, not all Judeans were exiled, for a remnant remained. There is almost no significant record of revelations by God in Judah during the exile, especially after compatriots that opted to flee to Egypt had forcefully taken Jeremiah with them. In addition to its land being emptied during the exile, Judah lost some of its land. The Judean identity in Judah disintegrated due to the influx of foreigners into the land and their subsequent influence on the remaining Judeans. Those that remained in Judah were unable to establish an exclusive Judean community and identity effectively; in any case, not before the Babylonian exiles returned early in the time of the Persian Empire. The paucity of information about the lifestyle in Judah during the exile attests to the veracity and rectitude of the theological concepts of the exile of Judah from 605 to 539 BCE.

Opsomming

Die Ou-Testamentiese verbale uitdrukking van 'die ballingskap van Juda' tydens die Babiloniese ballingskap het aanleiding gegee tot die persepsie dat die landstreek van Juda leeg was sonder enige inwoners. Die Bybelse uitdrukking is nie noodwendig strydig met die historiese feite nie, maar dit is teologies en kwaliteitsgeoriënteer van aard. Die ballingskap van die elite wat uit Jerusalem na Babel weggevoer is, die teregstelling van sommige en die vlug van ander na Egipte en ander aangrensende state het Jerusalem ontwrig en die stad disfunksioneel in elke nasionale sfeer gelaat. Die koninklike en godsdienstige dienste, wat in Jerusalem, die hoofstad,

gesetel was, is gestaak. Die leegheid van Juda word aangedui deur die afwesigheid van die koninklike en godsdienstige gesagsinstansies, 'n toestand wat deur Babel in sy wraak bewerkstellig is. Sonder sy koninklikes, kultus, handel, leer en regstelsel was Juda inderdaad leeg en in ballingskap. Nietemin, al die Judeërs is nie weggevoer in ballingskap nie, want 'n paar het agtergebly. Daar bestaan bykans geen betekenisvolle rekord van openbarings van God in Juda tydens die ballingskap nie, veral nadat medelandgenote wat verkies het om na Egipte te vlug, Jeremia gedwing het om saam met hulle te gaan. Afgesien van die leegheid van sy land tydens die ballingskap, het Juda 'n gedeelte van sy grondgebied verloor. Die Judese identiteit in Juda het gedisintegreer as gevolg van die instroming en invloed van vreemdeling in die land. Die wat in Juda agtergebly het, was nie in staat om 'n eksklusiewe Judese gemeenskap en identiteit effektief te vestig nie; in elk geval, nie voordat die Babiloniese bannelinge vroeg tydens die Persiese Ryk teruggekeer het nie. Die karige inligting oor die lewenstyl in Juda tydens die ballingskap getuig van die geloofwaardigheid en korrektheid van die teologiese konsepte rakende die ballingskap van Juda van 605 tot 539 v.C.

Keywords

exile
exiles
emptiness
Yehud
Judah
theology
deportation
depopulation
history
Babylon
Persia
returnees
remnant

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The impact of the Babylonian exile on the nation of Judah from around 587 BCE to 539 BCE cannot be ignored; however, the extent of the exile regarding the population of Judah during that time is a cause of disagreement among scholars. Issues oscillate around the total depopulation (*tabula rasa*) factor versus the eradication of governance and cultic functions of Judah. Exactly what was exiled, the whole population or the organisational structures of the population?

In the realm of Old Testament thematic studies historical and theological factors can hardly be separated. The theological exercise of interpreting scriptures does not preclude the understanding of the historical background of texts of concern. Precisely, this work fits in the biblical interpretation realm of Old Testament. A different interpretation approach to historical and thematic studies is proposed as the '*divine involvement approach*.' In this work the extent and meaning of the biblical concept of the exile of Judah is to be studied against the backdrop of the notion of the emptiness of Judah.

1.2 Background and problem statement

The study of the exilic and post-exilic affairs of the developments in Judah from a biblical point of view gives the partial impression that the land of Judah was literally desolate until the time of the return of some exiles. However, some biblical texts and scholars do not support this idea. While Ezra 6:21 and Nehemiah 1:2 recognise the existence of Jews in Judah, 2 Chronicles 36:15-21 and Lamentations 1:1-4 claim that those who escaped the sword were actually taken captive; thus, Judah was exiled.

Specifically, the biblical text that indicates that Jerusalem was desolate or emptied is in 2 Chronicles 36:20-21. Lamentations 1:3, a poetry book also states that Judah was exiled. Kaiser (1994: 87) points out that a third of the Old Testament literature is composed of poetry. Purvis

(1988:153) finds justification for the desolation or emptiness in the tradition that had forecast the desolation of the land in the event of disobedience would be a Sabbath rest for the land as explained in Leviticus 26:1-39. Ahlstrom (1994:822) indicates that the biblical authors concerned with the return and restoration of the Jews do not regard the remnant as people of reasonable significance. The texts reporting the conflicts that the returnees encountered clearly portray Judah to have had residents during the exile.

Since prior to the end of the 20th century, some theological authors do not consider the impression of the emptiness of the land of Judah to be factual. These authors include Grabbe (2006), Sacchi (2000) and Barstad (1996). Grabbe (2006:74) sees in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah 'loose ends' and hints at the issue of the desolate land. Grabbe (2006:353) asserts, '...but recent studies indicate that the bulk of the population ... remained in Palestine.' The opinion of Sacchi (2000:47) is that immigrants occupied the place of the exiles and life went on. The most relevant scholar is Barstad (1996:41) who writes precisely about the emptiness of Judah, which he calls a myth, and posits, 'While many scholars now admit that the most of the population apparently was left in Judah, they at the same time put forward the claim that this population possessed no culture, no religion, and no polity.'

One of the authors that seems to accept the notion of the empty land of Jerusalem is Pfeiffer, (1962:44), who postulates, 'No city in Judaea was permanently occupied during the time of the exile.' Supposing that, at the time of the return, Jerusalem was not occupied, it would be true that the city was desolate as believed. However, Pfeiffer (1962:44) does indicate that the remnant was living with foreigners during the exile. Of course, the age of the latter source indicates the change in scholarly understanding of the matter at hand.

The Bible and archaeological discoveries indicate that Jerusalem was inhabited during the exile. Indeed, there is no argument against the fact that Jerusalem was occupied during the exile. The question should be whether business, cultic ceremonies and cultural activities occurred in the land during the exile in the temple area as opposed to a mere question of literal desolation or occupation. Historical data, according to Ahlstrom (1994:822) and Kaiser (1998:425), attest that there were residents in the land during the exile. Furthermore, the immediate experiences of

the returnees clearly indicate encounters with the remnant or occupants of the land (Provan *et al.*, 2003:294).

Despite the archaeological exhibits, historical facts and biblical indications that the land was occupied, it remains to be considered whether the land was emptied of something that had existed earlier. If the emptiness would be properly perceived, there would remain nothing about which to argue. A few authors to be considered in moderating and explaining the emptiness of *Yehud* are Albertz (2002), Magnusson (1979) and Ahlstrom (1994). The state of the Jewish religion, which differed during exile from what it had been prior to exile, is the object on which Albertz (2002:101-102) focuses. Magnusson (1979:203-205) remarks on the Babylonian developments that affected Jewish religion and the extent of the destruction of the temple, which included the destruction of the ark. Ahlstrom (1994:84) states, 'It should be remembered that there was no official Judahite religion after the Solomonic temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed.' The mentioned authors examine the Jewish religious developments in Judah and in Babylon during the exile and thus help Bible students in their effort to consider the fullness (normality) or emptiness (disruption) of the Jewish religion in Jerusalem during the exile.

The purpose of God in allowing the Babylonian supremacy over Judah according to Jeremiah 5:15-19 was to let them serve strange people in a strange land for having served idols. This kind of experience was meant to help them see the difference between serving God and strange idols or people. Albertz (2002:103) identifies one of the causes of the exile, according to Jeremiah 5:19 and 9:13, as disobedience to the first and second commandments. Therefore, the Jews needed to experience the difference between the rule of God as King and the rule of a heathen king in order to abate the tendency of vacillating between serving God and other gods. The remnant did not experience the effect of the exile to the same extent than the exiles did. For this reason, the exile caused the returned Jews to be alienated from their fellows-Jews. This is also why the post-exilic Jews (the remnant and returnees) had divergent religious views.

By the look of things, biblical discourse does not portray an element of a formal reunion between the returnees and the remnant. The returnees became further removed from the

remnant Jews and developed separately. When the exiled and remnant met, the remnant had almost no role to play in anything that had to be done. Ahlstrom (1994:822) indicates that, according to the Bible, the returnees did not accept the remnant. The author (1994:846) further presents the remnant as the poor Jews who claimed that the returnees were foreigners.

There is a scholarly argument supported by, among others, Tomasino (2003:48-49) that Judaism was different from Yahwism. As Yahwism was diluted by idolatry, it precipitated the exile. It is interesting to consider the differences between Judaism and Yahwism. The returnees had forsaken mere Yahwism and came up with Judaism, which was different and not accommodating to the remnant. Probably, it was because of its (Yahwism) idolatry that was detested by the Jews who had actually felt the consequences of idolatry, which was the exile or Babylonian dominion. Ahlstrom (1994:847) explains that the hostility between the returnees and the remnant was fuelled in exile by passages such as Ezekiel 11:15-21 and 33:24-33. Furthermore, Jeremiah 24, which is about the analogy of bad and good figs, also draws a distinction between the remnant and the exiles. On the one hand, the above prophetic expressions say nothing in a positive sense about the future of the remnant, but only speak of doom. On the other hand, the prophets express hope for the future return of the exiles to their land, Judah. It appears that the remnant would never repent of the sin of idolatry in the way the exiles did. Moreover, God would restore the exiles to their place after his divinely ordained disaster had wreaked havoc on the remnant. Judaism, which detested idolatry and its consequences, would replace Yahwism. In the development of Judaism, there was no room for thought of a similar development of religion in Judah with which to unite at the time of the return, but a rigid inclination to exclusivity, even with regard to the remnant found in Judah during the time of the return.

Some scholars shed more light on the development of monotheistic Judaism, of which its very nature was contrary to syncretistic Yahwism. Several aspects of the Jewish religion were refined, reviewed and redefined during the birth and growth of Judaism, but the process was not smooth all the way. In addition to emphasis on individual fate as opposed to national fate, some doctrinal redefinitions ensued (Routledge, 2008:234-5), such as true fasting and the

relationship between the ritual ceremonies of sacrificing and the application of religion or faith in social or economic spheres of life (Hanson, 1995:204-206). Furthermore, adherents of Judaism engaged with each other, the prophets and God and, as a result, there was more doubt in God's role in the covenant. Demoralisation (Hanson, 1986:266) among the returnees was prevalent to such an extent that it disrupted the building of the temple. Only when Haggai appeared and encouraged them to rebuild the temple they resumed their task. This matter, which is of critical importance, will be better understood and explained with the help of Alberty (2002), Turner (1973), Magnusson (1979) and Ahlstrom (1994). Alberty (2002:101-2) considers the nature or condition of the exilic Jewish religion and highlights its formative element during the exilic time. Turner (1973:24) presents Ezra as the founder of Judaism. The principles of Judaism were derived from the unsuccessful Yahwism and formulated in exile. Later, Ezra returned to Judah to carry out the restoration and revival of Judaism comprehensively. Magnusson (1979:195) sees 'a new philosophy and theology' that developed in exile by the rivers of Babylon. Ahlstrom (1994:841) says that after the destruction of the first temple there was no common Jewish faith.

The Jews that came from Babylon were of a faith that was different and opposed to the one that they had espoused prior to the exile. According to Magnusson (1979:266), the exiles played a huge role in structuring and writing the Jewish tradition. Alberty (2002:103) opines that the prophetic messages of Jeremiah that had been rejected earlier were then accepted. Thus, the exiles had evolved to embrace a new faith in the same deity with the intent to displace the faith that had existed prior to the exile. The emptiness of Judah was not necessarily literal, but partially religious. For further explanation of this matter, Hoerth (1998) and Alberty (2002), who share further interesting views, may be consulted. Hoerth (1998:385) hints at the dilution of the remnant due to intermarriage that led to the influx of Samaritans, whose views eventually led to the 'blurring of religious values.' Alberty (2002:102) explains that the Jewish religion was relegated to a family level with a content of lament.

1.2.1 The main question

What critical aspects of Jewish life were disrupted or halted by the Babylonian exile?

1.2.2 Subsidiary questions

The following questions are posed as a transition from the background and the problem statement to the methodology section. These questions lead to probable solutions.

1. How pivotal is the understanding of the geographical situation at the time of the transition from the New Babylonian Empire to the Persian Empire in biblical interpretation?
2. Is the addressee of selected biblical book important to understand the message of the Biblical authors about the exile?
3. Is the Bible historical or theological first, and is theology historical or contextual?
4. How can exilic archaeological finds help in solving an apparent conflict between theology and history in the theme of the extent of the exile?
5. What does the Biblical literature concerning the time of the exile and the return say about the extent and context of the exile of Judah?
6. Can there be harmony between religious and historical facts if they are in conflict?

1.3 Aims and objectives

1.3.1 The aim

The major aim of this work is to explain that Judah was deprived of its conventional religious and political activities during the exile and not that it was totally depopulated.

1.3.2 The objectives

- i. To reach a better geographical understanding of the exilic and early Persian time regarding the land of Judah and to gain a proper perspective of the impact of the exile on the geography of Judah.
- ii. To know and understand the Biblical authors and the recipients of their messages in their historical context in view of the intentions of the Bible writers.

- iii. To use various historical sources and determine the seriousness of the concept of the exile of Judah in determining the relationship between history and theology in Biblical studies.
- iv. To study and make use of archaeological finds to mediate between historical and religious information in conflict.
- v. To find a theological or biblical meaning of the exile of Judah in context.
- vi. Finally, to find or not to find harmony between historical and religious writing.

1.4 Central theoretical argument

The central theological argument of this thesis is that Judah was indeed exiled due to the completely disrupted conventional cultic and political activities in Judah, but the exile of Judah did and does not mean a removal of the whole Judean population.

1.5 Methodology

The approach to the subject in point is geographical, historical, archaeological and theological in order to establish harmony and moderation regarding the question of the emptiness of Judah during the exile. Albertz (2002:111) comments on the emptiness of the Holy of Holies, making it succinctly clear, 'the Holy of Holies remained empty; at the most a golden mark set into the pavement could symbolise the divine presence.'

The geographical understanding to be sought should assist the researcher to see the distinction between Israel, Jerusalem, *Yehud* and Judaea during and after the exile. The impact of the exile on the geography of the land of Judah will be studied to magnify the fact that only a non-existent capital city functionality could result in major loss of land and identity dilution. It must be figured out whether or not the Jewish cult and state could exist without functional Jerusalem at all, keeping in mind that Jerusalem was the place where God's name dwelled. The exilic and early post-exilic geography of Judah shows that the concept of the exile of Judah is not literal, but conceptual in nature and the truth of it may not be found in any of the two firm extreme positions. There is a need to consider literal and functional factors in order to arrive at

a reasonable conclusion. Some of the sources shedding more light on this subject are Miller & Hayes (1986), Kaiser (1998), Conder (1848-1910), Turner (1973) and Aharoni (1967).

Introductions to relevant books of the Bible will be consulted in order to get an insight into biblical expressions in their context and religious understanding. An example is the book of McKenzie (2010), who emphasises genre sensitivity. Furthermore, the recipients of the messages of Bible writers will be identified by using the method of Kratz (2005), which is based on biblical texts. The recipients of the messages of the Bible that have to do with the exile of Judah were not only post-exilic, but also remnant Judeans during exilic era. The basis of the differences that some biblical scholars have about the extent of the exile will be considered in view of the understanding of the addresses. Some sources to be used are Bible commentaries and expository books by authors such as Hanson (1995), Grabbe (2006) and many others. The latest theological literature will be considered in seeking a proper theological understanding of the subject.

Historical sources include relevant extra-biblical literature to determine what it says about the exilic and immediate post-exilic experiences in Jerusalem. The destruction of the temple and walls and burning of the gates of the city by Babylonians for political reasons was intended to instil or entrench obedience and uproot resistance, will be studied. The goal of these studies is to determine which aspects, whether they are religious or political, of Jewish life became weak or almost non-existent. The scanty information about the lifestyle of remnant Judeans will be considered to figure out if it does support the concept of the exile of Judah. Primarily, the approach of Miller & Hayes (1986) will be adopted in this research. They approach Biblical history by studying primary sources of Bible writers and publications of other scholars. Ahlstrom (1994) will be one of the major historical sources to be used, especially because he considers theological, geographical and, to a certain extent, archaeological concepts.

Archaeological discoveries and interpretations of these discoveries will be considered to figure out whether their scope of finds indicates cultic and political activities or not. The paucity of exilic finds in Judah will be emphasised to negate the extreme notion of total depopulation and the that of exilic continuity in Judah. Furthermore, the argument that the exile of Judah is either

a myth or fiction will be refuted by exilic and post-exilic finds. A conceptual understanding of the exile of Judah will remain as the reasonable understanding of exile of Judah. The method to be applied in this area will be the study of relevant literature. The lessons and indications to be extrapolated in archaeology about the state of Judah during the exile will be magnified to bring about harmony between biblical and historical facts. Some of the sources to be utilised, not excluding the latest articles, will be Hoerth (1998), Avigad (1980) and many others.

From a theological point of view, this research will consider sources that question the impression and expression that Judah was emptied. Examples are Barstad (1996) and sources that attempt to explain the emptiness of Judah during the exile. This is the area where there exists a gap of scholarly consensus or explanation. The approach of Kaiser (1994) in interpreting biblical narratives will be implemented in this research. Furthermore, literary criticism and form criticism as explained by Hayes & Holladay (1998) will be used in order to have an informed understanding of the relevant texts. Some of the latest and available theological articles will be considered in order to update the thrust of the thesis. The concept of the exile of Judah was expressed by God earlier and wrought by God when there was need for it.

In conclusion, making use of geographical, historical, theological and archaeological concepts harmony will be sought and found in the matter of the emptiness of Judah.

1.6 Classification into chapters

- a. Introduction
- b. Geographical names and borders of the exilic and early post-exilic period
- c. The relevant writers, addressees and messages during the exilic and Persian period
- d. Historical study of the concept of the emptiness of exilic and early Persian Yehud
- e. The archaeological finds of the exilic and early Persian time in Judah
- f. Theological perspectives on the emptiness of exilic and early post-exilic Judah
- g. Finding harmony between history writing and theology writing
- h. Conclusion

Chapter 2

Geographical names and borders of Judah in the exilic and early post-exilic period

2.1 Introduction

Since the thrust of this research relates to the emptiness of the land of Judah because of the Babylonian exile, an insight into the geography of the land is essential. The primary geographical consideration is the size or borders of Judah before, during the exile and in the early post-exilic era. In addition to knowledge of the historical background of a particular biblical text in order to understand that text, knowledge of the dynamics of its geographical setting could be of great value in further clarifying the text. The physical landscape of Judah might not have changed during the exilic and early post-exilic period, but the borders and uses of the land changed remarkably in the course of those times. Furthermore, the inhabitants might have been mixed with foreign people and extensively influenced by them.

The land or territory of Judah did not remain the same in terms of size and meaning from the time of the settlement through to the time of the early post-exilic era. The geographical understanding of what the territory of Judah had been is of paramount importance to any writer, including Bible authors, teachers or preachers and Bible students, if the writer or speaker wants to communicate their message meaningfully. Realizing that Judah was not merely the name of a land would be conducive to an understanding that the name Judah also denoted other aspects of the lives of the people of Judah.

The passages in 2 Chronicles 36:17-20 and Lamentations 1:1-4 indicate that Judah was taken into exile to Babylon. These biblical books were probably written with different messages at different times. The authors' understanding of Judah as a nation, land, religion or even a city should be deciphered so that the subject of the emptiness of Judah should be clearly understood in a religious sense that is closely tied to politics or governance of the land of Judah, which was centralised in Jerusalem. Bruce (1997:87) concisely intimates, 'All political activity in Judaea ceased.' This happened since all the royal and cultic elite were taken to Babylon.

The borders of Judah did not remain the same from pre-exilic times until the post-exilic times. Isserlin (2001:92) posits, 'The southern part of Judah was gradually infiltrated by Edomites – it came to be known as Idumea ...' Ahlstrom (1994:805) indicates that the infiltration reached the 'north of Hebron.' However, Ahlstrom (1994:823) states, 'The borders between the different districts may have been about the same as those of the former kingdoms.' Furthermore, the author (1994:823) elucidates, 'In the southern Transjordan the Moabite and Edomite territories may have seen an increase in nomadic life-style, while southern Judah became mainly Edomite territory.' Though official borders were not drawn, part of the south of the land of Judah was inhabited by Edomites, who were not subject to Judah at the time of the end of the kingdom of Judah. Bruce (1997:84) posits, 'Possibly the Chaldeans officially gave the Negev to Edom.' The post-exilic territory of Judah was indeed not the same.

2.2 The territory of Judah

From a historical point of view, the territory of Judah was affected by the changes of epochs and dynamics of relations with the neighbouring nations or countries. Aharoni and Avi-Yonah (1979:106) explain the impact of the subjection of Israel to the Babylonians with regard to the territory of Judah thus:

'Judean settlement remained mainly in the outlying regions, some of which probably became detached from Judah already in 597 B.C. These were included in the list of the "residue of Israel" preserved in Nehemiah 11:20-36, which records mostly sites in Benjamin, the Negev, and the Shephelah on the border of Philistia.'

Even though Babylon may not officially have authorised the settlements of other nations in the territory of Judah, the nature of politics at the time was prone to border expansions that would, in addition to enjoying the spoils after defeating a particular nation, increase revenue generation by imposing the levy payment on the subjected nations.

Judah became a kingdom after the division of the monarchy and did not totally succumb to Assyria as Israel did in the north. Even though Babylon did not displace Judeans and officially introduced different peoples into Judah, the kingdom of Judah seems to have lost some of the

territories it gained as a tribe from the time of the settlement in Palestine throughout the time of the united monarchy until the time of the independent kingdom of Judah in the south. Aharoni and Avi-Yonah (1979:108) describe the picture of the loss of land gained saying, 'Judah lay wasted, surrounded by hostile provinces on every side, and the remaining exiles came up against the inhabitants that had remained, the "remnant" who had seized their lands.' From an archaeological point of view, the authors (1979:171) present further evidence of the negative impact of the exile on the land of Judah:

'The distribution of these sealings reached from Mizpeh and Jericho in the north to Beth-zur and Engedi in the south, and Gezer in the west. These were the borders of the reduced Judah of the beginning of the period of the second Temple...'

There were signs of previous land losses as the situation worsened more and more from the time of the dominance of different nations like Assyria and Egypt up to the period of the rule of Empires like Babylon and Persia. Pritchard (1991:90) elaborates on the changes with regard to the land of Judah through different epochs:

'The province of Judah was subdivided into districts and half districts (NEH 3). Palestine under the Persians was part of the satrapy called "Beyond the river" ... The internal administrative divisions of the satrapy are not clearly evidenced, but it is generally agreed that the Persians inherited the division created under Assyrian and Babylonian rule.'

Epoch changes never left the land of Judah the same as before.

2.2.1 Original territory of Judah

The original territory of Judah lay south of the territory of Benjamin and encompassed the territory of Simeon in the south according to the highly disputed account of the Israelites' settlement in Palestine in the book of Joshua. The eastern border of the territory on the map appears to be largely the Dead Sea.

With regard to the time of the settlement or the arrival of the Israelites in Judah, Aharoni and Avi-Yonah (1968:55) state, 'The establishment of the tribes in their various territories continued

during the twelfth century.’ However, House (1998:197) presents the date of conquest of the land of Canaan to have been 1400 or 1200 BCE. Furthermore, the writer (1998:208) hints at the issue of the whole land being seized fully or partially and indicates that the issue becomes theological in nature. Aharoni and Avi-Yonah *et al.* (2002:58) say that by the twelfth to eleventh centuries BCE Israelites had somewhat settled, but that they had definite enemies like the Philistines. The most likely date of the settlement would be around 1200 BCE.

The western border of the land is highly debated as to whether it had been the Mediterranean Sea or not. Aharoni and Avi-Yonah *et al.* (2002:60) consider the Philistines as the western neighbours of Judah. The writers (2002:59) recognise that the Israelites did not penetrate some lands or territories during the time of the conquest. Barton and Muddiman (2001:169-170) regard the eastern border to have been the Dead Sea and the western border or ‘limit’ to have been the Mediterranean Sea. With regard to the northern border, the authors (2001:169-170) are convinced, ‘It is constructed carefully round the southern extremities of the city of Jerusalem... pointedly excluding it from Judah.’ Furthermore, the authors (2001) figure the southern boundary out to have stretched from the southern end of the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean Sea through the Sinai land. According to Aharoni and Avi-Yonah (1968:53), ‘... its northern boundary is identical with the southern border of Benjamin.’

Perego (1999:33) illustrates graphically through a map the early Israelite tribal settlements (see *Map 1. The territories of the Twelve Tribes, p. 14*). The historicity and date of the division of the land for Israelite tribes is highly contested; however, the division referred to here is the envisaged division without a complete seizure of the land, because of the existence of nations that had not yet been exterminated. The debate will be considered later on.

Ottley (1904:95) expounds on determining the original territory of Judah saying, ‘The hill-country of Judah was that portion of the range which lay between Jerusalem and the district called Negev.’ The author further posits, ‘The Shephelah, strictly speaking, formed part of the territory of Judah, it was a fertile and open district, but the least secure of Judah possessions, as it was naturally much exposed to the incursions of the Philistines.’



Map 1. The territories of the Twelve Tribes

Regarding the quality and potential usefulness of the land, Barton and Muddiman (2001:170) say the following:

‘The long list shows how extensive and varied Judah was, incorporating both the rich plain and the dry wilderness. The blessing of Jacob associates Judah with viticulture, at home in their terraced slopes of the hill country and lowlands... The lands bordering the drier area were suitable for sheep-rearing than agriculture.’

Indeed, it was a land of milk and honey. Aharoni and Avi-Yonah (1968:51) describe the land in general, ‘The Israelite areas of settlement were thus limited in the main to the hill regions and to Transjordan.’ The authors (1968) further list Judah as one of the ‘hill regions.’ The land of Judah, which is the concern of this research, lay west of the Jordan and the Dead Sea. The

territory of Benjamin, which became part of the kingdom of Judah after the time of the united monarchy, was also situated on the western side of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea.

Originally, Jerusalem was Jebus, the land of the Jebusites, which was annexed by David and named Jerusalem or City of David. Barton and Muddiman (2001:170) indicate that when the tribes of Judah and Benjamin first settled in their territories, they were unable to exterminate the Jebusites, who were residing in Jebus. This fact is based on Joshua 15:63, 18:15-19, 28; and Judges 1:8. Eventually, King David managed to overcome Jebusites and he made Jebus or Jerusalem the capital of Israel, as written in 2 Samuel 5:5-10. Howard (1998:29) mentions the specific date of this event in his comment, '... since David captured Jerusalem from Jebusites ca 1003 B.C.E' Briefly, Jerusalem was neither part of Judah nor Benjamin before the reign of King David.

In general, Davies and Finkelstein (1984:85) claim that the historical territory of Judah stretched from Beersheba, which was situated in the territory of Simeon, to Jerusalem, which was close to the borders of Benjamin and Judah. According to the record of the Bible, the tribe of Judah was allocated land during the time of the leadership of Joshua. It is interesting that Jebus, according to the listing of towns in Joshua 18:11-28, is said to have been allocated to the tribe of Benjamin. The tribe of Simeon was allocated land within the land of Judah, because Judah had more land allocated to them than they needed (Joshua 19:1-9). In the light of the conquest, which is dated around 1200 BCE, and the emergence of the first king, Saul, which occurred around 150 years later, Howard (1998:35) suggests the date of the settlement of Judah, Benjamin and Simeon could have been between 1200 and 1050 BCE. Butler (1983:143) thinks that the border outlines of Simeon, Dan and Issachar could have been decided just prior to the monarchy. The writer further explains that the details about the borders of Judah represent the time of King Jehoshaphat, and that the borders of Benjamin were decided during the time of King Abijah. The adjustment or writing about borders is not of much significance, but the territorial positioning is of paramount importance.

2.2.2 The size

The size of the land of Judah was in no way fixed through different historical epochs. The territory of the land of Judah should be measured specifically at the time of the exile in order to determine the feasibility of the land being actually emptied. Baly and Tushingham (1971:112) are quite precise in their measurements:

‘The actual territory of Judah was extremely small. Beersheba marked the southern and Geba the northern frontier of the kingdom... the direct distance between them being no more than 80 km...from the western edge of the Judean plateau to the shores of the Dead sea averages about 32 km.’

The authors refer to the time of King Josiah, which occurred during the period of the divided monarchy, when Judah was a kingdom. Pritchard (2000:46) explains the geography of the kingdom of Saul and indicates that Saul lived around 1000 BCE. The writer further presents the tribe of Benjamin, to which King Saul belonged, to have settled south of the Ephraim tribe and north of Jebus, which lay south of the settlement of Benjamin. Pritchard (2000:47) indicates David’s land of origin to be Judah, more specific the village of Bethlehem. This implies that the tribe of Judah could already have been settled at the time when David emerged as a warrior. That could be during the very lifetime of Saul, ca 1000 BCE.

Considering the size of Judah as a kingdom makes it sound big, but considering it as a province, changes the impression of its size. Turner (1973:8) depicts the eastern part of Judaea along the Dead Sea to have been a wilderness and the Shephelah in the east to have separated Judah from Philistia. Thus, the eastern area, the wilderness, was a less useful area of Judah; therefore, the useful area of the land of Judah was relatively small.

The land of Judah as a province after the end of the kingdom of Judah would be determined by Babylonians or Persians and the area would become even smaller. Kaiser (1998:422) explains the territory of Judah as a province of the Babylonian Empire to have stretched from ‘... north of Bethel to south of Beth-zur and from the Jordan river to just west of Emmaus and Azekah – an area about twenty-five miles north to the south and about thirty miles east to west. It was a

shadow of what Judah had been in days past.’ The author refers to Judah as a province of Babylon at a time when Benjamin was reckoned as part of the province. Indeed, a rigid conception of Judah as a land may not help in an attempt to understand some biblical texts that present Judah as an area that could be emptied or declared empty for a given period. If one considers Judah within the big picture, it becomes clear that it grew from a tribal area to a kingdom, which included the Benjamin territory, and regressed to a mere province according to Babylonian and Persian politics or governance.

2.2.3 Lack of clarity

Though some historical facts that affected the area of the tribe, kingdom or province of Judah may be known, the exact details concerning the widest probable borders of the historical area are a subject of much contention.

Ahlstrom (1994:768-769) refers to the boundaries of Judah according to the biblical record (Joshua 15) to have been determined during Josiah’s time. The author further indicates that the western boundary was the Mediterranean Sea and further deems it to be ‘fictitious’ and postulates, ‘It does not refer to a particular historical situation.’ Turner (1973:247-248) considers the borders according to Joshua 15:1-63 and states, ‘The territory actually possessed by Judah however was considerably smaller, leaving much of the southern area to the Edomites and the western area to the Philistines.’ The issue of the conquest and settlement is highly debated and there is very little hope of arriving at a consensus on it.

Hess (1999:493-495) challenges the notion that the settlement was militant in nature by claiming that some sites show no signs of destruction from an archaeological point of view. The author suggests, ‘... it may be that the account in Joshua describes the defeat of coalitions of kings but not necessarily the destruction of the cities they represent...’ Hess (1999:495) further indicates that some settlements occurred on unoccupied land and therefore did not call for a battle. Soggin (1993:142-143) explains some settlement versions or methods ranging from military campaigns, peaceful settlements in unoccupied lands, individual tribal conquests, tribal alliances with a view to conquest, and peaceful co-existence with other nations. Callaway

(1988:54) finds conflict in the presentation of the settlement matter in Joshua and Judges. The author says that in Joshua, the conquest is followed by the 'allotment' while in Judges the 'allotment' is followed by the conquest. In seeking a solution to the matter of the settlement, Callaway (1988) and Van Seters (1983) point to a direction in finding a solution. Van Seters (1983:331) posits the following: 'The designation of sources for the second half of Joshua is a hotly debated issue. Most scholars are willing to admit that the division of the land among the tribes is secondary to the original narratives.' As for Callaway (1988:55), the pivotal issue seems to be that the books of Joshua and Judges were written quite some time after the settlement had taken place. Indeed, the challenge of the settlement lies in the authorship dates of both the books of Joshua and Judges. None of the authors dispute that a settlement of Israelites took place in Palestine around 1200 BCE. The details of the territorial allotment or boundaries might have been added to the description of the settlement of the people. Nothing disputes the actual Israelite settlement in Palestine. Nevertheless, due to the questions that have already been raised, Callaway (1988:53) regards the issue of how the Israelites settled in Canaan to be 'unsettled.'

Davies and Finkelstein (1984:86) poignantly state the following: 'Since we lack a comprehensive list of the borders of the Judah province, it is not surprising that the date and significance of these lists is still a subject of dispute, but it seems they can be attributed to the Persian period and that they are complementary.' However, to Hess (1999:496), peaceful infiltration is anachronistic.

The authorship and dates of the books of Judges and Joshua are not the only matters that create uncertainty. The extent of the western border of the tribe of Judah is another issue. Soggin (1993:145) scrutinises the territorial advancement of the tribes of Judah and Simeon, which were not always successful. The author finds it unclear whether the Philistines had already arrived in Palestine when the tribes of Judah and Simeon were conquering lands. Hess (1999:495-496) says that at the time of the infiltration of Israelites, the Philistines and Arameans were also arriving. This realisation precipitates the author's inclination to perceive a peaceful settlement to be anachronistic, as stated above. Dothan (1997:96) details the events

saying, 'The Philistines arrived in Canaan from the Aegean as hostile invaders at the beginning of the twelfth century BCE, destroying the Canaanite cities that lay in their path.' The author names the cities as Ashdod, Beth Shemesh, Ashkelon, Gezer and Megiddo and, on page 98, also Ekron. Fugitt (2002:372-373) presents the Philistines as immigrants entering Canaan from some Greece islands and 'mainland Greece,' since their pottery repertoire was Mycenaean in nature. Furthermore, the writer (2002:375) portrays the Philistines to have been a mixed people that might have come together for business or people that might have fled from some natural disasters such as 'earthquakes', which were prevalent on islands or in coastal areas. Famine is also said to have been one of the probable reasons that led to the formation of a people called 'Philistines' or 'people of the sea,' since they might have been relocating to places with some food. The author agrees with Hess (1999) about the date of the arrival of Philistines in Palestine to have been ca 1200 BCE. The bottom line is that the borders of the territory of Judah, especially around the settlement period, are somewhat unclear and highly disputed.

The question of the conquest of the Promised Land needs some consideration, since it is a disputed matter in scholarly realms. McConville and Williams (2010:4) posit, 'The prevailing scholarly view, however, is that Joshua is not a factual account of historical events.' Earl (2010:172) says that some names in the list of towns of Judah are twelfth century BCE, while others are seventh and eighth centuries BCE. Nelson (1997:185) points out, 'Owing to the author's southern perspective, Judah naturally comes first and has far more space devoted to it than to any other tribe.' The author (1997:186) further says that the writer of the book of Joshua knew of no pre-monarchic structure of towns and boundaries; thus, the writer could have lived during the time of the divided monarchy, i.e. precisely the time of King Josiah.

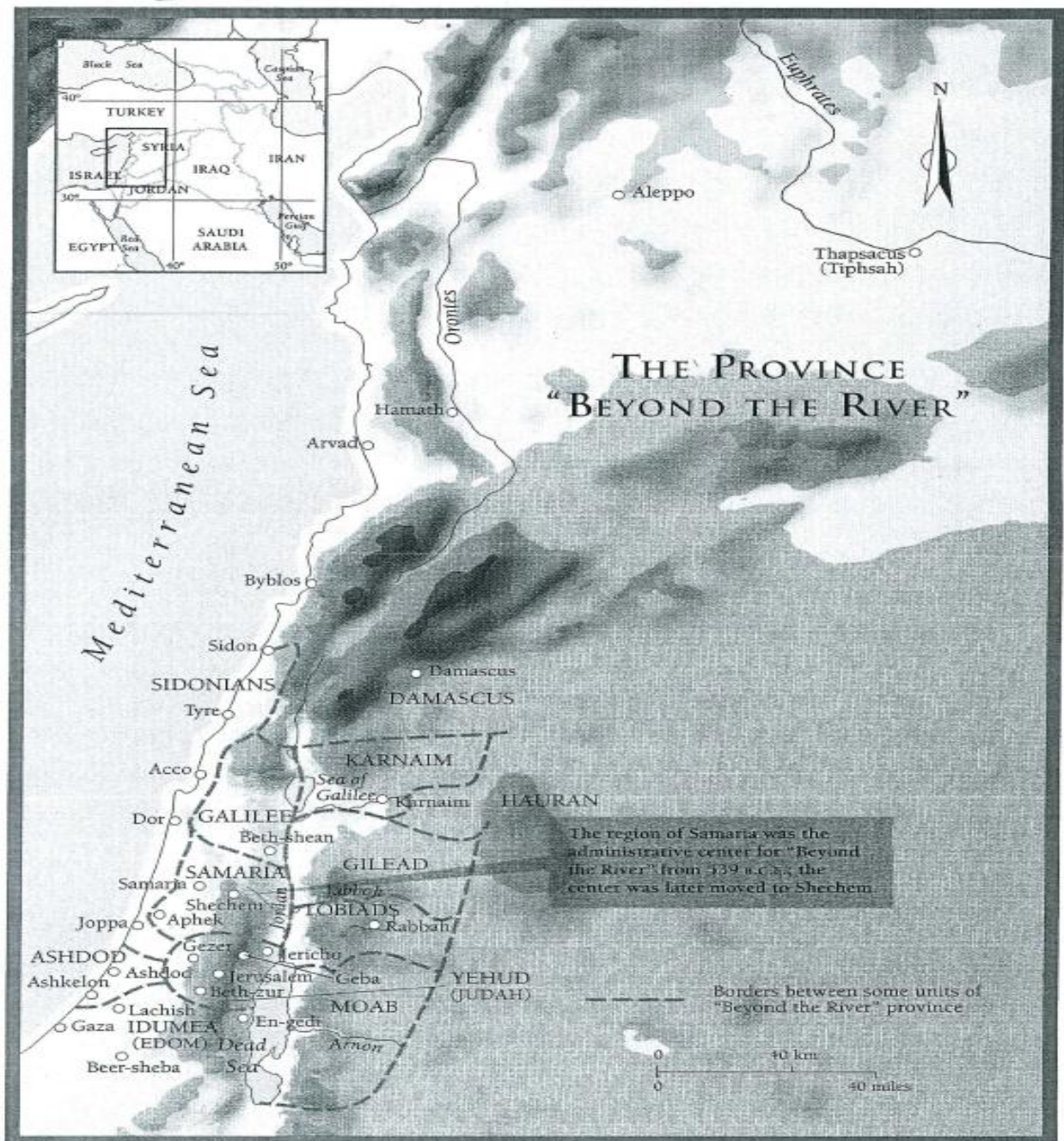
House (1998:208) and McConville and Williams (2010:5) agree that the book of Joshua is mostly a theological book as opposed to a historical book. McConville and Williams (2010:5) explain the theological intention saying, '... since it aims, like much of the Old Testament, to persuade its audience to remain faithful to Yahweh, God of Israel.' However, the authors assert: 'None of this means that an Israelite conquest of Canaan did not happen. As it has been observed, at the least the author of Joshua does not intend to furnish a realistic description of the taking of

Jericho...' House (1998:208) commenting about the matter of the conquest completed versus the conquest to be completed says that continuing with the conquest was a theology of the time that the conquest was to be a process and not an event in the past. Nevertheless, the writer (1998:208) emphasises the view, 'The major cities have been taken and serious alliances broken, but individual places are left for each tribe to win.' Earl (2010:172), in addition to rendering the record of Joshua as 'mythical' postulates, 'The communities that produced and read this literature did so in order to hold fast to their claim on the territories of their ancestors.' The conquest did happen, even though its history was not written as it was happening like many other historical records. Indeed, the elaborate details given about the territory of Judah, glaringly, point to the southern author and a time of the divided monarchy, which helps in this research with its focus on Judah. Coogan (2009:164) concurs with the late composition of the account about the territory of Judah and cautions that it does not dispute the existence of the southern settlement alliance. Soggin (1993:158) outlines the southern settlement alliance as composed of Judah, Simeon, part of Levi and 'groups' of Caleb, Othniel, Jerah and the Kenites, '... all of whom were later absorbed into Judah in circumstances which are unknown to us.'

2.2.4 Cities of Judah

Within the frame of the uncertainty about the boundaries of Judah throughout its historical record, it is reasonable to consider the towns about which it is known that they were part of the territory of Judah. Beitzel (2006:347) presents the towns of the province of Judah to have been Jericho, Gezer, Jerusalem, Beth-zur and Geba (*see Map 2. The province beyond the river*, p. 21). However, Bruce (1994:13) portrays Judah's territory during King Josiah's time. At the time of Josiah, if the author is correct, the kingdom of Judah was longer than the Dead Sea from north to south, and the cities in the kingdom were Kadesh-barnea, Tamar, Beersheba, Arad, Engedi, Hebron, Lachish and Jerusalem. Aharoni and Avi-Yonah (1968:44) put forward that the conquest of the towns in the territory of Judah were accomplished by the tribes of the south, namely Judah and Simeon, including the Caleb and Kenaz clans. The authors explain that the Jebusites were defeated upon the arrival of the Israelites in Canaan, but that they recovered

and reoccupied Jebus until King David defeated them. The authors say that the clans of Caleb and Kenaz settled in Hebron, Debir and Arad. The tribe of Simeon is said to have dwelt in Beersheba. The southern tribes also seized Lachish.



Map 2. The province beyond the river

There is a scholarly debate with regard to some Philistine towns that are numbered among towns of Judah in the biblical account (Joshua 15:12,35,45-47) . However, Aharoni (1967:196), presents Philistine towns such as Gath, Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza and Gerar to be outside the borders of Judah tribal land. The writer (1967:198) further refers to Judges 1:18, which says that the Philistine towns Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron had been under Egyptian control prior to the arrival of Philistines in Palestine. The Philistines controlled those cities from around 1200 BCE. It is noteworthy that Tappy (2008:383) postulates, ‘... it seems unlikely from an historical perspective that Judah ever wielded any lasting political control over Ekron, Ashdod, or Gaza.’ This implies that Judah controlled some of the Philistine towns for a while. Moreover, Tappy (2008:384) hints at the military prowess of King Uzziah (early eighth century BCE) and King Hezekiah (late eighth century BCE), who do not seem to have left the Philistine territory the same. Nevertheless, the author (2008:388) indicates that the success of Uzziah and Hezekiah never affected the central area of the Philistine major cities, Ashdod, Ekron and Gaza, but the peripheral Philistine areas. In trying to explain the unlikelihood of the biblical account of the list of Judah towns in the books of Joshua(15:12,35,45-47) and Judges (1:18), Tappy (2008:284) refers to the time of Josiah to have been the time when the towns listed were all controlled by Judah due to the weakening of Assyrian sway over all the relevant areas around Judah.

2.3 Judah through political changes

The land of Judah as a tribal territory, kingdom and province could not remain the same. The military successes under the different kings, though not all, from king David through to the divided monarchy gained some territories for Judah. However, when other kings subjected Judah in its weakness, the land shrank in size because it lost some territories under its auspices. The impact of political changes on the land of Judah was positive if Judah won and negative if Judah lost a battle.

2.3.1 Conquest and settlement

According to the biblical account in the book of Joshua (1-6), the Israelites entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, and the land was divided according to the

various tribes of Israel. It is noteworthy that even the tribes of Israel had changed somewhat. The tribe of Joseph disappeared, and in its place, the new tribes of the sons of Joseph would appear as Manasseh and Ephraim. The tribe of Levi was not apportioned any particular territory except for the cult area as their dwelling place. Earlier, the tribe of Levi dwelt in the territory of Benjamin, where the Israelite cult was based. Later on, during the reign of David, when Jebus (Jerusalem) was seized from the Jebusites and it became the capital of David's regime, the cult was moved to Jerusalem, according to Joshua 21:1-41, and the Levites dwelt as allocated in all the territories of the other tribes of Israel. Throughout Israel, all their cities were forty-eight in number. Specifically, in the territory of the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin, the Levitical cities were thirteen according to Joshua 21:4. Thus, Judah was never purely Judah, but it usually had an inclusion of one or more tribes. As Aharoni and Avi-Yonah (1968:106) observe, the tribe of Judah dwelt closer to that of Benjamin and with that of Simeon, to the south. Therefore, the fact that tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Simeon included Levites was part of their history most of the time.

2.3.2 The time of the united monarchy

The united monarchy is the period during which King Saul, King David and King Solomon reigned. According to 1 Samuel 13, King Saul engaged in battle against the Philistines at Gilgal, where Saul offered a sacrifice and displeased God. However, in 1 Samuel 14, the LORD rescues Israel. Despite the issue between Saul and Jonathan over Jonathan's life, according to 1 Samuel 14:47-48, Saul defeated the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Philistines and Amalekites. By this defeat, Saul delivered Israel from the hostile nations, but he did not extend the boundaries of Israel or Judah in particular. Moreover, the Philistines remained enemies of Israel for the rest of Saul's days as king.

King David is presented as a warrior king in the Bible. The book of 2 Samuel reports the victory of David against the Jebusites and that he 'took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David' (2 Sam 5:6-7). Thus, he increased the land of Israel and Judah in particular, since he came from the tribe of Judah. The eighth chapter of 2 Samuel reports that David seized Metheg and Ammah from the control of Philistines and further increased the territory of Israel,

though it is not stated whether the land gained became part of the territory of Judah. According to 2 Samuel 10 and 11, David made Moabites, Arameans and Edomites subject to him and they paid tribute to him. He further defeated the Ammonites with their allies. Soggin (1993:59) says that the account of David's battles against foreign nations in 2 Samuel is generally ascribed to an old source. The author (1993:31) points out a scholarly debate on the beginning of Israelite history, which would not be limited to the eighth century and would not commence during the reign of David. To a certain extent, King David had a positive impact on the territory of Judah by extending its borders.

King Solomon, the successor of King David, his father, reigned from 971 to 931 BCE. According to the New Bible Dictionary (1996:1116), his wisdom was greater than that of his counterparts 'in Egypt, Arabia, Canaan, and Edom....' He only experienced having enemies towards the end of his reign and one of those enemies was Jeroboam. The passage of 1 Kings 9:20-23 indicates that Solomon made the remnant of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizites, Hivites and Jebusites slaves in his territory used them to carry out his construction plans. Collins (2004:247) refers to 1 Kings 4: 21 that indicates that he ruled the nations from the Euphrates to the Philistines area and extending to the boundary of Egypt. Furthermore, the writer indicates that Solomon is said to have entered into marriage relations with nations that had been enemies of his predecessors. Commenting from the background of the wealth of Solomon, which is not traceable in archaeological realms, the author states, 'Solomon's fabulous empire is now regarded by many scholars as a fiction, a dream of glory from a later time.' The author also remarks, 'Those who defend the historicity of Solomon's splendor argue that the critics are arguing from silence.'

It does not appear as if Solomon increased the size of the map of Israel during his reign. He seems to have been a king that focused on internal royal and cultic affairs. The fear of his father, David, seems to have lingered in the memories of neighbouring countries for a long time. The military excellence of David, his father, caused the other nations to treat Israel as a mighty nation; hence, throughout Solomon's reign there was peace. However, the use of marriage unions with neighbouring nations is not to be underestimated as one of the causes of peace during his regime.

Bimson and Kane *eds.* (1985:43) mention the tribe of Judah as the thirteenth revenue district during Solomon's reign. During that time, the significance of Judah was that Jerusalem, the cult centre and capital city, was within the territory of Judah. Judah was the heart of Israel, but it had to contribute to the revenue of Solomon's hegemony just like any of the other tribes.

2.3.3 The time of the divided monarchy

More changes came about during the time of the divided monarchy, which commenced after the reign of Solomon. Prior to the division of the kingdom of Israel, Judah did not really stand out as a special tribe, even though the popular kings like David and Solomon originated from it. With the division of the kingdom after Solomon's reign, Judah became the name of the southern kingdom. It was not a tribal name anymore.

2.3.3.1 The division

At the time of the division of the house of Israel, the name Judah became the name of the remnant of the Davidic dynasty. The interesting thing that happened was that those who wanted independence, the northern tribes, took the name Israel, while those who remained loyal to the Davidic dynasty settled for the name Judah. This research focuses on Judah, which in the books of Chronicles and Lamentations is said to have been emptied during the exile. Nichol ed. (1976a:76) regards the end of the united monarchy to have been caused by the indiscretion of Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor. To Lioy (2010:76-87), Solomon's 'moral drift' caused by the thought that his success was bound to prevail for God's sake, his marriage to foreign wives, over-taxation, Rehoboam's insensitivity and the moral decay of the kings of Israel were the causes of the division. Lioy (2010:85) unfortunately has to conclude, 'Now only one two [sic!] tribes, Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to Rehoboam and the dynasty of David.' The author continues to say that Jerusalem lay between Judah and Benjamin. He also points out that the tribe of Simeon and part of the tribe of Levi seem to have been forgotten.

The military power of the kingdom of Judah could have been weakened because of the division of the kingdom. It could be said that it boiled down to a reduced military capacity and thus

rendered the territory of Judah to be at risk. Consequently, Faust (2008:168) regards the 701 BCE campaign of Sennacherib as 'disastrous,' because 46 cities of Judah and a number of villages were destroyed, and 200 158 persons were exiled. Faust (2008:169) says, in addition to war casualties, '... territories were torn from Judah and given to Philistines... There is a consensus that Judah suffered a major blow.' Thus, the size of the kingdom of Judah or the land of Judah decreased.

However, during the reign of Josiah, according to Grabbe (2007:210-211), the borders of the kingdom of Judah were extended and Judah was liberated from Assyrian oppression. Grabbe (2007:217) indicates that the original borders of Judah were restored together with some towns that had been occupied by Israelites from the northern kingdom before they were defeated and controlled by Assyria. Grabbe (2007:218) indicates that, among others, the towns annexed included those in Galilee and all Samaria. In the west, according to Grabbe (2007:220), Josiah annexed Joppa and Ekron. Even though Josiah could not regain all of the lost Israelite land, he significantly increased the territory of the kingdom of Judah to the east and to the west.

2.3.3.2 Judah and Benjamin

The division of the united monarchy into two kingdoms was influenced by political and security strategies. The smallest tribe, namely Benjamin, largely became part of the border between the north and the south. Generally, the tribe of Benjamin remained loyal to the Davidic dynasty. Noth (1959:233) intimates the following:

'Probably, Judah was able to maintain its hold on part of the Benjaminite glaxis for Jerusalem against Israel which claimed, not unfairly, possession of the whole of Benjamin. The border conflicts, in which presumably both sides had some successes and reverses, probably took place entirely within the territory of Benjamin.'

The author (1959:233-234) further indicates that it occurred that the north, Israel, seized Ramah, which was in the Benjamin territory. It seems the south used the territory of Benjamin as a buffer zone for protection against the north. Generally, because of the division of the monarchy, the name of the Benjamin land or tribe ceased to exist and it was somewhat

swallowed by the name Judah. Thus, the composition of Judah, in addition to some Levites, embraced Benjamin.

2.3.3.3 Judah and Simeon

The tribe of Simeon, who settled within the territory of Judah, had no option but to relate with the tribe of Judah. Wellhausen (1891:24) lists the tribes included from the north as Simeon, Levi and Judah and (1891:29) intimates, 'The shattered remains of Simeon, and doubtless those of Levi also, became incorporated within Judah...' The tribe of Levi may be explained otherwise because it had settlements in all the tribal settlements of Israel. It was existent both in the north and in the south. It makes sense that, eventually, the tribe of Simeon, by virtue of its settlement within a Judah settlement, lost its independent existence and became part of Judah. Thus, Judah meant Simeon, Benjamin and part of Levi, from the time of the divided monarchy.

2.3.3.4 Comparison of the north and the south

Noth (1959:227) presents the south as a smaller kingdom compared to the northern kingdom of Israel. Miller and Hayes (1986:233) expand further saying, 'In many ways – including size, geographical position and military strength – Israel was the dominant kingdom.' Furthermore, the same authors (1986) portray Judah as a 'fragment state' when compared to Israel. The territory of Judah was average in size compared to the other tribes. Even with the addition of the small tribe of Benjamin and the tribe of Simeon, its size did not equal half of the northern kingdom of Israel. According to Crossley (2002:299), with the division of the kingdom in 930 BCE, the serious deterioration, decline and disintegration of the twelve tribes had only begun.

However, in other respects, Finkelstein and Mazar (2007:151) posit, 'Judah was different than Israel, mainly in the sense that it was a true, demographically cohesive, nation-state.' Soggin (1993:201) indicates that one of the things that were difficult in the northern politics was the fact that the son of the king would not obviously succeed his father. Bright (2000:236) succinctly presents the dissimilarities between the north and the south thus:

'The two states, though superficially similar, were in important respects quite different. Judah though smaller and poorer had the more homogeneous population and relative geographical

isolation; Israel was larger and wealthier and though nearer the center of the old tribal system, contained a large Canaanite population and was by accident of geography more exposed to outside influence.'

Finkelstein and Mazar (2007:152) emphasise that the population of Judah in Jerusalem grew tremendously. The authors (2007:153) further state:

'In the southern hill country, as well as in the plateau to the north of Jerusalem, the number of settlements and the total built-up area increased dramatically. Both grew considerably in the Shephelah and the Beersheba Valley. In the late-eighth century, Judah reached its peak territorial expansion and its largest population ever.'

The writers (2007:154) continue conjecturally that such a growth in population was fuelled by the defeat of Israel by the Assyrians 722 BCE, as some Israelites fled to the south in order to avoid being deported to other lands as others were. The other element that caused Israel to lose citizens to Judah was the flight of Levites from a strange cult where a golden bull was set up to represent the invisible God.

2.3.3.5 North and south relations

The separation of Judah and Israel made them independent but neighbouring kingdoms. Unfortunately, they had to relate either negatively or positively to each other. Collins (2004:255-256) indicates that despite being warned not to engage in war against Jeroboam, Rehoboam eventually fought against Jeroboam and the conflict continued even after their regimes. Provan *et al.* (2003:262) outline some negative relations between the north and the south. Jeroboam waged war against Judah, and when Judah cried out to God, God smote the Israelites in favour of Judah (under Abijah's rule). The other incident occurred when Asa made an alliance with the Aramean king to fight against Baasha, the King of Israel, who had taken Ramah city in the Benjamin area of Judah. Indeed, Asa's plan worked. Provan *et al.* (2003:262) point out that Asa managed to regain Ramah and seized Mizpah and Geba, thus extending the borders of Judah. However, Noth (1959:235-236) indicates that during the Omrite dynasty in the north, the relations were peaceful to such an extent that they could unite against some attacks of other kingdoms. However, after the Omrite regime, the relations deteriorated again.

Bright (2000:236) says that eventually, 'Saner counsel... prevailing, the war ceased to be pressed and soon was dropped altogether.'

2.3.4 Exilic Judah

Soggin (1993:261-262) elucidates that prior to the dominion of Babylon, Egypt had been the dominant power, but was overthrown at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE. That meant that Judah automatically became subject to Babylon. The author (1993:262) indicates that King Jehoiakim apparently joined forces with Egypt in resisting the supremacy of Babylon in 601 or 600 BCE, contrary to the exhortation of Jeremiah that they should submit to Babylon. Provan *et al.* and Long (2003:279) explain that, initially in 597 BCE, Babylon determined to control Judah by appointing kings such as Zedekiah. It was an attempt not to totally violate the royal structures of nations that were under their sway. That was not to be the mode of operation. According to Provan *et al.* and Long (2003:279), '... Zedekiah was involved in discussions with neighbouring peoples about the possibility of a revolt.' As a result, the history of Judah had a record of total destruction of their cultic and royal centres.

2.3.4.1 The impact of subjugation

By virtue of being subject to Babylon, all the subjects of Judah became subjects of Babylon. All the expansion successes of Judah came to naught at its subjugation. The extent of subjugation also depended on its cooperation with Babylon. Unfortunately, things became worse because of the resistance of Judah against Babylon.

The revolt under the leadership of Zedekiah increased the impact of the destruction of Judah. Soggin (1993:264) convincingly states, 'This time Nebuchadnezzar struck without hesitation.' Collins (2004:277) reports the horrible fate of Zedekiah saying, 'His punishment was brutal.' His sons were murdered in his full view, his eyes were taken out and he was taken away never to be heard of again. Bright (2000:344) states clearly, 'Nebuchadnezzar's army left Judah a shambles.' Unfortunately, the revolt of Zedekiah was not the last act that provoked the Babylonians. Babylon, according to 2 Kings 25:22, appointed Gedaliah as ruler, who was later killed by some of the people in Judah (2 Kings 25:25). Babylonian reaction to these insurrections

was such that the land and the population of Judah would never be the same. Bright (2000:244) indicates that the large population of Judah of the eighth century BCE was greatly reduced since some people were killed, others fled to other lands and others were actually exiled. The author (2000:244) points out that even in post-exilic times, the residents were just over two hundred thousand in Judah. Furthermore, with regard to land, the author remarks that the territory north of Beth Zur was 'assigned to the province of Samaria...' Without being over-elaborate about what transpired during the exile, the author concludes, 'But their estate was miserable and precarious.' The deportations of the elite of Judah were rather disempowering to the kingdom of Judah.

2.3.4.2 Peripheral areas lost

According to Bruce (1997:84), the southern part of Judah was seized by Edom and the Negev was lost as part of the territory of Judah. According to Soggin (1993:264), the Edomites '... were being pushed from their homeland by Arab pressure.' Lipschits (2005:69) propounds that the Negev, Jordan valley and the Shephelah were deserted due to the weakness of the military of Judah. The author says that the abandonment of these areas only occurred after the 'economic and political system' had failed to sustain itself around '... the early days of the Babylonian siege.' Turner (1973:249) indicates that a community in the town of salt (Ir ham-Melah) was 'abandoned' about the time of the Babylonian invasion. Consequently, peoples like the Edomites and others of the surrounding areas infiltrated the peripheral areas of Judah, thus shrinking the territory of Judah. Soggin (1993:264) expounds on the destruction of Jerusalem in Judah during the Babylonian supremacy and posits, 'Various places in Judah suffered a similar fate.' In other words, the destruction did not only occur in Jerusalem.

Because of losing their independence to Babylon, the area of Judah lost control of the peripheral areas. Thus, pre-exilic Judah was bigger than exilic Judah, which was becoming smaller and smaller with time. The population was also severely reduced.

2.3.4.3 Central Judah destroyed

The exile not only affected Judah at the periphery, but also right in its centre. Ahlstrom (1994:798) states, 'With the capture and destruction of Jerusalem, the kingdom of Judah went

out of existence.’ With the centre having been destroyed, everything that was left became insignificant regarding Judah. According to Lipschits (2005:112), there was a reason for such destruction. He says, ‘The city was laid waste in a systematic and calculating manner designed to eradicate it as a political and religious center, and it remained desolate and abandoned.’ Judah became a mere piece of land with almost no hope of restoration. Judah was reduced from an independent kingdom to a paralyzed or weakened state of existence.

2.3.4.4 Other destroyed cities

Reasoning from an archaeological point of view, which may not give an accurate date, Kaiser (1998:405) mentions the following cities to have been destroyed during the period of exile: Beth Zur (in the south) and Beth Shemesh (in the west). Provan *et al.* and Long (2003:279) categorically present the extent of the destruction of Judah by Babylon and indicates that in the south of Jerusalem, the towns Lachish, Azekah, Ramat Rahel and Arad were destroyed. In the area of Benjamin, destroyed cities were Bethel, Gibeon, Tell el-Ful and Mizpah. However, Isserlin (2001:92) comments, ‘... though in Benjamin territory towns like Mizpah and Bethel survived the war, together with some of the far south.’ Miller and Hayes (1986:416) report signs of destruction in Lachish to the west, Arad in the south, EnGedi in the east and conclude, ‘This is not to suggest... that every Judean city was left in ruins.’ Thus, Judah was severely affected by their defeat at the hands of Babylonians in the periphery and the centre – almost everywhere.

2.3.5 The early Persian Judah

By the time of the Persian epoch, Judah had been tremendously reduced by the exile. With the destruction of Jerusalem and other cities, Judah was an incapacitated kingdom. During the Persian period, Judah was known as יהודה (Yehud), which is an Aramaic expression of a Hebrew word יהודה (Judah). Nothing about the making of the name of the land is of Persian origin. However, the Judah of the Persian period was very small compared to early Judah. *Yehud*, as expressed by exiles and understood by imperial authorities, actually meant the city of Jerusalem and almost nothing more, except for a few rural areas for subsistent farming to

sustain life in Jerusalem. Persians could not know more than what the exiles would have told them, which would relatively limit their understanding of *Yehud* to Jerusalem (Ezra 5:13-17; 6:3,12; 17:3). The Babylonians dealt with Judah especially in the area where they experienced fierce resistance in their restructuring of the governance of Judah. However, despite Judah losing some land due to their inability to defend themselves against nomadic infiltrators, the major purpose of any structure put into place by Babylon was to inculcate conformity to Babylonian requirements and not primarily to keep the Judean country or territory intact.

Lipschits (2005:92) indicates that the Babylonians treated Judah as a province and appointed Gedaliah as a governor. It was an attempt to desist from honouring Davidic or royal lineage in the governance of Judah since such an approach would yield no positive results. However, though Gedaliah was given some security by Babylonians and placed in Mizpah in the territory of Benjamin, curtailing Judah's resistance was unlikely to succeed. After the assassination of Gedaliah, there is almost no information about the governance of Judah as a province until the time of the Persians. Lipschits (2005:119) presents the scholarly consensus that after the murder of Gedaliah, Judah became a sub-province under the Samaria province. Moreover, the writer (2005:125) attempts to link governors from Gedaliah to Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel, and posits the following:

'It seems that a straight line connects these two governors and Gedaliah and there is nothing to contravene the idea that Judean governors continued to serve in Judah throughout the sixth century BCE. Furthermore, there is no evidence of a change in the province's status at the beginning of the Persian Period. If there was a change during the transition to Persian rule, it was in the appointment of governors from members of the royal family and a restoration of power to the nation's elite who had been deported to Babylon...'

Bright (2000:343) intimates: 'To write the history of Israel in this period is difficult in the extreme. Our Biblical sources are at best inadequate. Of the exile itself, the Bible tells us virtually nothing save what can be learned indirectly from prophetic and other writings of the day.' The gap between Gedaliah and Sheshbazzar as governors of the Judah province is very interesting and helps explain the situation of the exilic period as aggravated by the revolts of

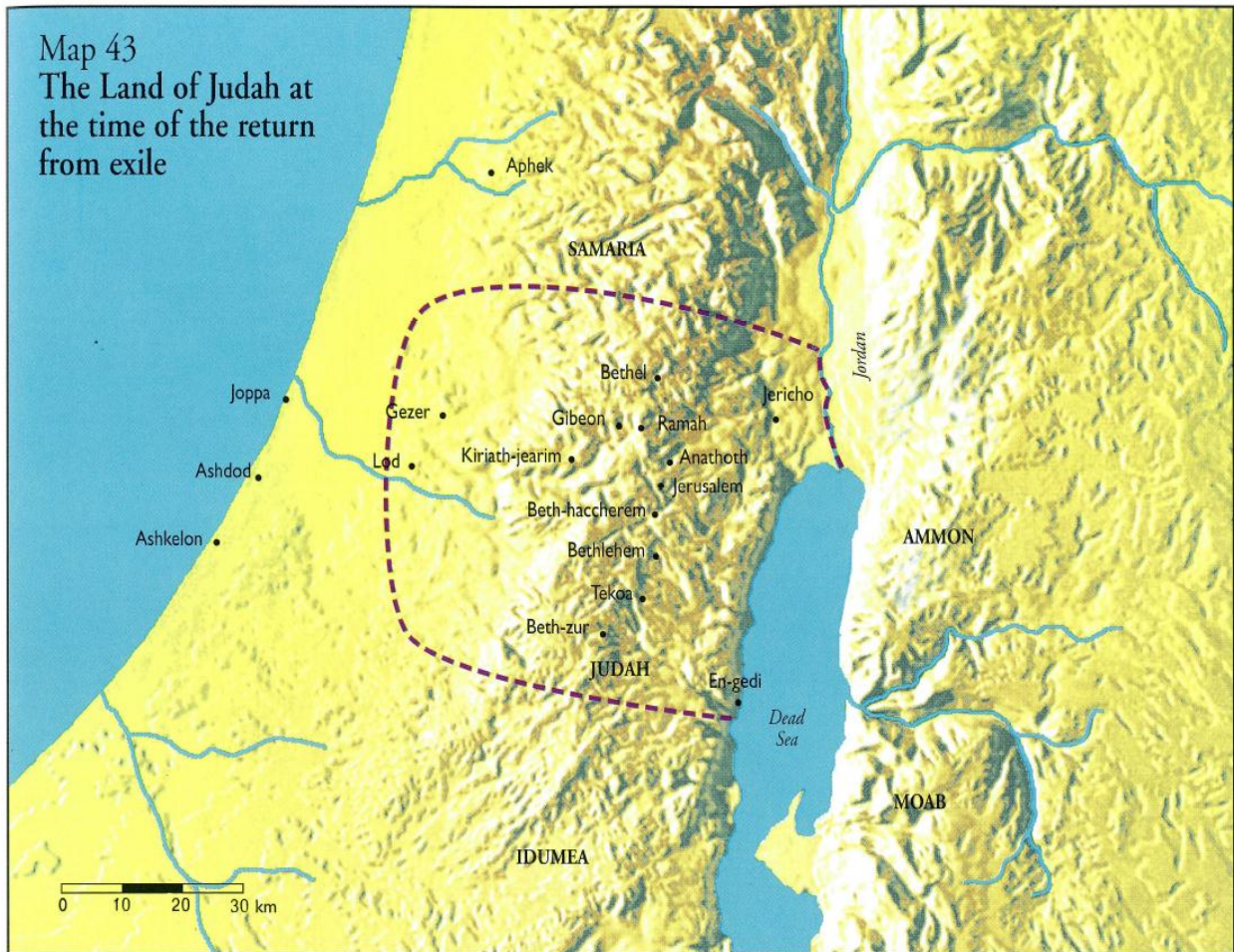
the elite of Jerusalem against Babylon. What makes sense is that the governance of Judah was part of the governance of Samaria, the province beyond the river, where there was no rebellion and where the province of Judah was demonised as composed of a rebellious and murderous people. This is manifest on the occasion when a letter was written by the so-called 'adversaries of Judah' to the Persian king Artaxerxes about the building of Jerusalem, which would lead to rebellion, according to Ezra 4:12-21. Judah was left in limbo until the Persian period. When it emerged as a province in the Persian period, it was informed and conceived by the influence of the exiles, who were largely descendants or actual persons deported to Babylon from the city of Jerusalem and who were not necessarily from the whole kingdom-cum-province of Judah. Thought was city-oriented rather than province-oriented. Thus was the emptiness of Yehud.

Nevertheless, the territory of the so-called *Yehud* province of the Persian period should be considered regarding its probable size which was reduced by the exile. Perego (1999:33) presenting *Yehud* on a map (see Map 4 below) says its length appears to be shorter than the Dead Sea from north to south. Making use of the kilometre scale included by the author, from north to south, *Yehud* would be about 65 kilometres, and from east to west, it would be about 77 kilometres.

2.3.5.1 Not exclusive

Even though Judah was regarded as *Yehud* in the Persian period, it was not treated as an independent province from the onset. Bimson and Kane *eds.* (1985:56) explains the Persian organisation: 'The Persian Empire was divided into satrapies, each administered by a Persian commissioner... Palestine belonged to the satrapy "Beyond the River."' Beitzel (2006:347) in the form of a map portrays *Yehud* as one of the provinces of the satrapy that was south-west of the river Euphrates (see Map 2 above). Perego (1999:61) presents Judah indeed as one of the smallest provinces (see Map 4 below). At the time of the return (see Map 3 below), Idumea had increased in size at the expense of Judah.

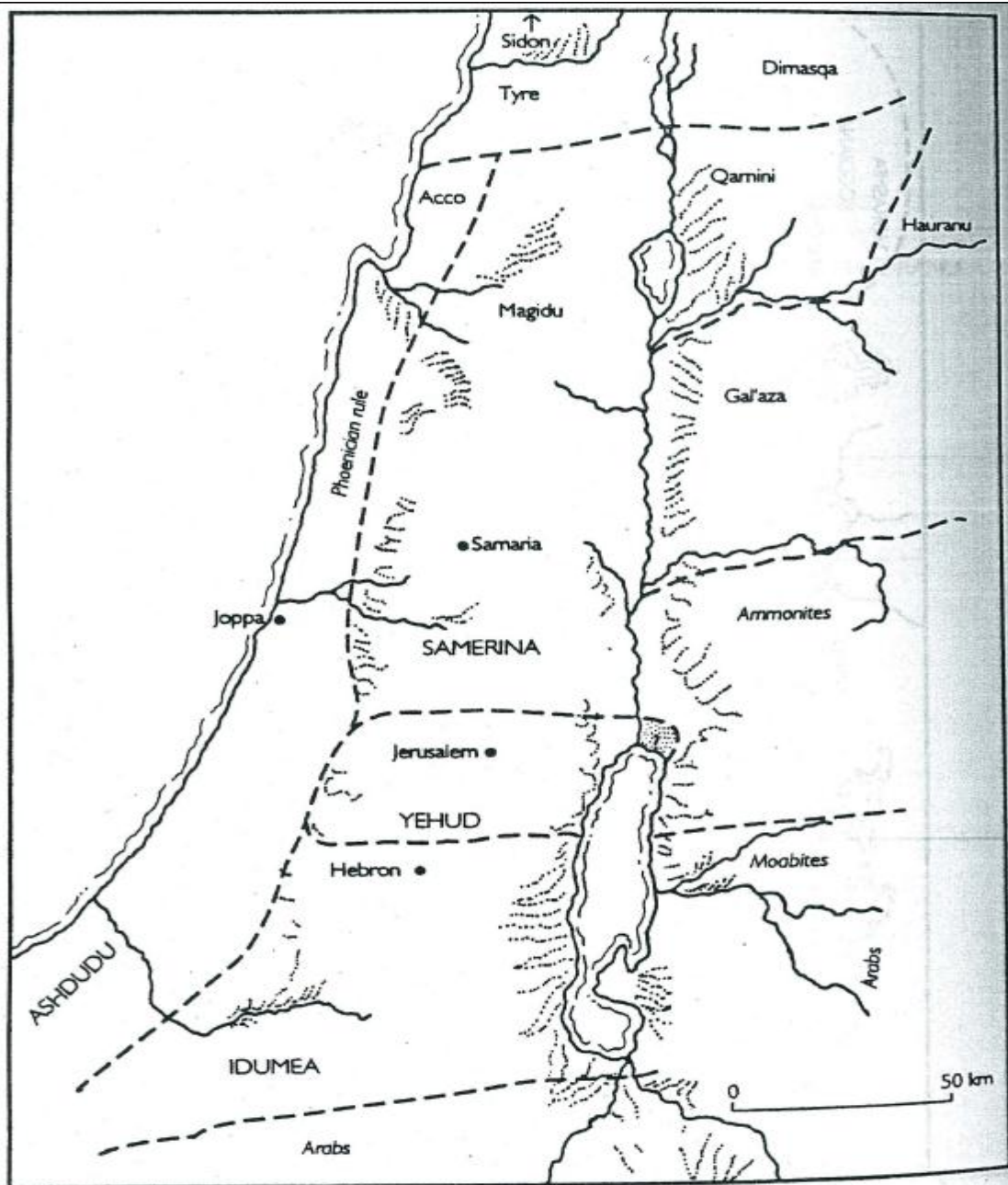
2.3.5.2 Reduced territory



Map 3. The Land of Judah at the time of the return from exile

In commenting on *Yehud*, Kaiser (1998:426) indicates that it may not be regarded as Judah, but the Judah just prior to the exile is the right geographical situation to consider. This sentiment suggests either that Judah ceased to exist as an entity during the exile or that the *Yehud* of the post-exilic era was not even a considerable remainder of pre-exilic Judah. Aharoni (1967:355) poignantly elucidates the reduced state of Judah thus:

‘The southern hill region was gradually taken over by the Edomites who were being pushed out of Mount Seir as the Nabataean moved in. The returnees from Babylon found a dense and well-established Edomite population in all of the hill country south of Beth-zur.’



Map 24. Palestine in the Persian Period (fifth century BCE)

Map 4. Palestine in the Persian Period (fifth century BCE)

The author declares that some towns in the Negeb and the Shephelah were not part of Judah after the exile namely, Dibon, Jekabzeel, Jeshua, Moladah, Beth-pelet, Hazar Shual, Beersheba, Ziklag, Meconah and EnRimmon. In the northern Shephelah, the author (1967:542) mentions Zorah, Jarmuth, Zanoah, Adullam and Azekah as towns lost during the exile. The presentation of

a reduced Judah by Ahlstrom (1994:542), (see *Map 4. Palestine in the Persian Period (fifth century BCE)*, p. 35), makes the point clear that *Yehud* was a tremendously reduced Judah.

Lipschits (2005:134) indicates that during the exile, there were developments that affected Judah negatively and states: 'These changes affected the boundaries of Judah and its population for hundreds of years to come. The boundaries of the Babylonian province of Judah shrank....' Provan *et al.* (2003:288) express the opinion that Sheshbazzar was appointed governor of the area that was called Judah, and in his time, that was called *Yehud*. The writers do not bother explaining the probable territory after the exile. A land without leaders could experience any kind of crisis or attacks. Moreover, in the case of *Yehud*, the Babylonian Empire had countries and nations of the Levant under their control; thus, nations within the Empire would hardly attack each other, but a situation where some national borders within the Empire could be disregarded and disappear was highly possible. Such a disregard of the pre-exilic borders of different nations would result in a dilution of cultures and practices. In the situation of the dilution of identity and cultures Jerusalem was the city that had to be rebuilt as per the determination of the returnees, whose priority was not the entire Judah, but Jerusalem the place from which they were exiled.

2.3.6 Ideological split between Judah and Benjamin

The huge reduction of the land of Judah during the exile is considerable enough to inform a Bible student's concept of Persian Judah. On the surface, it is not clear that there was a huge difference between Judah and Benjamin, but the exercise of zooming in on the so-called Judah of the early Persian period sheds more light on the situation. Edersheim (1995:972) states the following: 'Gedaliah had taken up his residence in the ancient Mizpah. Thither all that was left of Judah's representatives men gathered, as also the wives, daughters and children of the slain and the captives.' The place of refuge was found in the Benjamin area, which was not the centre of the revolt and where the revolt was not supported, which implies an ideological split in terms of supporting or resisting Babylonian rule.

Lipschits (2005:93) in elaborating on the appointment of Gedaliah as governor of Judah presents Judah to have been split into '... two groups with differing political orientations: (1) the supporters of the revolt, who were inside Jerusalem, and (2) the supporters of capitulation to Babylon, who were outside the city.' In the author's additional enunciation, Benjamin seems to have been part of the place outside the city where supporters of submission to Babylon were residing. The writer reports that Jeremiah was arrested at the gate of Benjamin when he was in flight from the people. The author (2005:93) points out, '... the officials in Jerusalem feared the propaganda effect of his desertion to the Babylonian side.' In addition, the author (2005:94) poignantly states, 'The impression we have is that the group of "Judeans who deserted to the Chaldeans" (Jer 38:19) were going to assemble at a specific place in the region of Benjamin.' Probably, there was a perception that Benjamin had sided with Babylon by not joining the revolt. Lipschits (2005:94) hints at the record that Jeremiah desired to buy a field in the territory of Benjamin in Anathoth and indicates that there was a period during the time of exile when there was a difference between the fate of Benjamin and the fate of Judah. The author further highlights the fact that the Benjamin area '... was not part of the area destroyed by the Babylonians.'

By the look of things, the exile did not acutely disrupt life in Benjamin, because the rebellion that caused the exile was non-existent in the Benjamin area. Snyman (2010:818) explains that there was a disruption of life in Jerusalem, especially in terms of business, '... but not for Benjamin where farming went on as usual.' The author continues to say that the workers were residents, not the 'colonizers.' Snyman (2010:819) contrasts Benjamin with Jerusalem as if Jerusalem was rather a tribal land or province when he states the following: 'Only when Jerusalem's status was heightened by the Persian administration, did the activities increase in Jerusalem and decrease in the Benjamin area.' Thus, a difference dispels the notion of a normal union between Judah and Benjamin throughout the period of the succession of Empires. The union of Judah and Benjamin was conceived when politics changed in Israel at the division of the monarchy. When politics changed during the invasion by the Babylonians, the union was affected by politics. Perhaps, conjecturally, Benjamin aligned with Judah because the first monarch originated from it.

The ideology of how to relate with Babylon was the dividing line between Benjamin and Judah. The other fact that testifies to the ideological division is that according to Lipschits (2005:105-106), 'The Benjaminites were joined by refugees who apparently had fled from Judah proper during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem.' Right there, the flight is not from city to city as in one country, but from one tribal land to another. The author further indicates that some refugees went to Moab, Ammon, Edom and other countries. In essence, this phenomenon made Benjamin to appear or to be treated by Judahites as another country or the land of other people.

2.4 Summary

The Persian emperor Cyrus favoured the province of *Yehud* after Babylon had destroyed it severely. Initially, Judah was just one of the tribes of Israel that settled west of the river Jordan and accommodated the tribe of Simeon within its territory. Judah worked together with the tribe of Simeon to expand its territory or to clear out other nations living within their allotted territory. Like other tribes, Judah had its share of Levites residing in Levitical cities. It so happened that the second king of Israel, David, originated from the Judah tribe. Since then it was reckoned among the major tribes of Israel and the capital city of Israel was in Judah since the time of David.

Unfortunately, with the division of the monarchy, Judah, having swallowed the tribe of Simeon, became a kingdom together with the tribe of Benjamin. Throughout the division of the monarchy, Judah increased or extended its borders as a kingdom and it was able to withstand the northern tribe and other intruders militarily.

When Babylon became the dominant power, Judah was reduced to a province that did not survive as an independent province because of the assassination of Gedaliah, the last governor of the Judah province in the Babylonian era. Due to the deportation of Judah's elite from Jerusalem, the flight of some residents of Jerusalem to other places and the deaths of others during the war, the population of Judah was tremendously reduced. These factors left the land too weak to defend itself, thus causing it to lose some towns to neighbouring nations and to

abandon others. Some towns were destroyed before Jerusalem was destroyed. The land of Judah was reduced remarkably and the political situation during the Babylonian Empire left Judah and Benjamin torn apart from each other, because while the Judean elite in Jerusalem was rebellious, Benjamin was submissive and deemed to have joined Babylon due to its surrender to Babylon. Judah proper, excluding Benjamin, effectively or technically meant 'Jerusalem' to the elite who had been deported. Hence, at the time of the return from Babylon, those who returned would not be considerate to the remnant in their reconstruction or building of the temple.

2.5 Conclusion

In concluding on the issue of the geography of Judah, and what Judah meant physically and ideologically, Pfeiffer (1966:334) briefly restricts post-exilic Judah or *Yehud* to the southern region, excluding some coastal towns. Benjamin territory was side-lined ideologically in the north, and in the south, the Negev and the Shephelah were practically lost. Therefore, it should be understood that the Bible writers of the exilic and post-exilic eras, such as the writers of the books of Chronicles and Lamentations, when they use the name Judah, refer to Judah proper, i.e. the reduced land of the Judah territory of the settlement time, the exclusion of Benjamin territory and the exclusion of other lost towns. Furthermore, these particular Bible authors imply that Jerusalem was almost everything that constituted Judah in their writings.

Chapter 3

The relevant writers, addressees and messages in the Jewish religion during the exilic and Persian period

3.1 Introduction

The passages pertinent to this research are 2 Chronicles 36:17-20 and Lamentations 1:1-4, since they relate the events of the exile of Judah. The combined book of Ezra-Nehemiah provides information about the restoration of what was emptied. The writers, addressees and messages that will be considered pertain to the three books mentioned above. 2 Chronicles 36:20 states, 'And he removed to Babylon those who were left of the sword; and they were slaves to him and to his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia;' while Lamentations 1:3 says, 'Judah went captive from affliction, and from great slavery. She dwells among the nations; she finds no rest. All her pursuers have overtaken her between the straits.' The introductory study of these passages, from Chronicles and Lamentations, and the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, is indispensable in the pursuit of a balanced understanding of the context and meaning of these three books.

3.2 Chronicles

3.2.1 Place in canon

Originally, Chronicles was made up of only one book. Japhet (1993:2) refers to the division of Chronicles into two books, 'Beginning with the fifteenth century, the division was introduced into Hebrew editions of the Bible.' Regarding the position of the book, Coogan (2006:446) says the book of Chronicles is the last book of the last section, called Writings, in the Hebrew Bible. There is consensus that in the Hebrew Bible, the position of the book was not between 2 Kings and Ezra. Hamilton (2001:503) indicates that in the original Hebrew Bible, the Ezra-Nehemiah book precedes Chronicles. In our conventional translations, Chronicles precedes Ezra and Nehemiah, two books, in accordance with the historical sequence of events. The main reason for changing the position of the book in our conventional canon was to classify it among the so-called 'historical books' of the Bible, a category that did not really exist in the Hebrew Bible

before the fifteenth century AD. Nevertheless, the said division of the book in the Hebrew Bible has not changed its place and name in the Jewish manuscript tradition and the Hebrew canon. Therefore, the intentions of the author(s) and its messages can still be studied.

3.2.2 Superscription

The title of the book of Chronicles is the key in order to understand it properly. It is especially necessary for Bible students who are not Hebrews or Jews. The understanding of the title determines the understanding of the book as intended by the writer or writers. Coogan (2006:446) explains that the two books found in the Bible were originally one book in the section called Writings in the Hebrew Bible and it was entitled, 'The Events of the Days'. The author expounds that the Septuagint created a misleading title with the notion of having information that is omitted in the so-called 'historical books'. The author arrives at the conclusion that the title, Chronicles, is 'vague'.

However, Graham (1998:201) states, 'In the Hebrew Bible, 1-2 Chronicles goes under the title "Events of the days" (*dibre hayyammim*) and also appears as two books.' The author refers to the fifteenth century division of the book into two books. Though he attempts to explain the split, the relevant question would be whether the split of the book is intended to obliterate its title and significance in the Hebrew Bible. The content of the book remains the same and the original title of the book has not been abolished. Japhet (1993:1) presents the meaning of the original title of the book as 'the events (or the words) of the days'. Yet, the writer hastens to say that the title refers to a history. The choice between the words 'events' and 'words' is pivotal to understanding the content of the book. Hill and Walton (1991:216) say, 'The Hebrew title of the book is literally "the words of the days" or "the events of the monarchies".' It is advisable that individual students of Chronicles should not content themselves with choosing a preferred meaning of the title, but that they should continue to study the book. They might find the ambiguous title to be pivotal to insight into the book.

In the superscription, the Hebrew word with the root *dabar* is used as a verb and it could mean 'to speak', 'to utter' or 'to pronounce', according to The Complete Word Study Dictionary

(2003:1440), but when it is used as a noun, it could mean ‘word, speech, matter or thing’ (The Complete Word Study Dictionary, 2003:1442). Moving beyond the root of the said word, Holladay (1971:67-68) presents the word in its used form, *dibre*, to mean ‘words’. The author continues to indicate that *dibre* used with a name could mean ‘history’. In the title of the book of Chronicles, it is used with a noun ‘days’, which is not a person’s name. The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew (1995:397) explains the word *dibre* using a number of semantic categories. In the first category, it could mean ‘words’, while it could mean ‘matters’ in the second category. Furthermore, in commenting on the first category, the writer essentially indicates that the differentiation between the first meaning and the second one is ‘not always clear’. The word ‘events’ does not seem to be applicable to the original superscription for the book in the Hebrew Bible. The view that complies with ‘the words of the days’ as the title of Chronicles is informed by the superscription itself, as written by the author or redactors, if the age of the title would be the same as that of the contents. The choice of the word ‘events’ seems to be informed by the contents of the book, which could have had a historical ring to some of its readers. The historical contents of the book serve as a vehicle to convey a message or as a vessel to bear the message. In our days, the history contained in the book would be treated as the background of a picture portrayed by the author of the book.

The exercise of deciphering the days referred to in the superscription is of critical importance and one should do it correctly in order to understand the book correctly. First of all, Chronicles appears to cover the period from Adam to the Persian Empire. Second, the author might not consciously have condensed biblical history from its origins up to the time of his writing, but he could have been commenting on the developments that took place through such a time-span or he could have written his text in a time or context of need. The days referred to in the superscription are the days of authorship. If it were not so, then another word such as ‘ages’ or ‘years’ could have been used instead of ‘days’.

3.2.3 Genre

In addition to a good understanding of the title of a biblical book, an insight into its genre is crucial to gain an insight into the book. McKenzie (2010:4) indicates that consideration of the

literary genre is highly important if we want to get a grasp on the culture in which it originated. The exercise to determine the genre of the book of Chronicles is the most difficult and misleading among genre studies of biblical books. It is like a song that may be misconstrued as a poem. The book of Chronicles looks like history to those who are not Jews or Hebrews or even to those who do not know much about the history of the Jews. Japhet (1993:31-32) says, 'For many generations of students, the book of Chronicles was regarded as what it claimed to be: a history.' However, the writer goes on to acknowledge that other scholars have regarded the book to be Midrash or a commentary, or some have even considered the author to be a theologian. McKenzie (2010:6) compounds the matter by saying that an ancient genre may not be the same genre in the present time. The scholarly differences of opinion with regard to the genre of the book called 'Chronicles' in the conventional translations is so startling that a student cannot help but take a personal position on the matter.

3.2.3.1 History

Many scholars and students (including myself with general high school and basic theological knowledge) see this book as a historical book. This is what it appears to be. Japhet (2004:122) recognises characteristics of other genres and concedes that Chronicles is also a historiography. Collins (2004:445) regards Chronicles as '... an alternative account of the history in the books of 2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings.' However, the writer hastens to indicate that it cannot be assumed that the book covers things left out in the earlier historical books, because the book itself does not narrate history in detail. The explanation of De Vries (1989:10) counteracts the view of Collins thus: 'The creators of the LXX, the Bible of the early church, clearly intended 1 – 2 Kings, with 1 – 2 Chronicles to be read as a parallel or variant version of the history in 1 – 2 Kings, with Ezra – Nehemiah as its narrative ... continuation.'

The author continues to say that the book of Chronicles was composed and canonised after the book of Kings. Chronicles appears to compete with the book of Kings, a tendency that probably emerged even during the process of canonisation. The intention of the translator in rendering the Chronicles of the Hebrew Bible into the Greek LXX seems to be more influential here than an author or a redactor who might omit some words. This influence is manifest, because the

translator did not only move a word, but the whole book, to an unintended place. The result was that the book was almost lost in its very availability.

In view of the difficulty to classify the book as a historical source, scholars that are aware of evidence that points to other possibilities have to justify, qualify, explain and adjust their position. Jonker (2006:875) categorises the book of Chronicles as a 'reforming history' within a phenomenon of establishing identity. Japhet (1993:34) justifies her position by saying, 'Taking all this into consideration, the best definition of Chronicles is that of a "history" written not by a mere "historian" but by an author who is fully aware of his task.' McKenzie (2010:113) adjusts his opinion thus, 'The Chronicler probably wrote after Ezra-Nehemiah and perhaps even in response to it. His work in Chronicles is best characterised as history writing, albeit for theological and didactic purposes.' Qualifying and justifying a history genre stance is actually a work of grafting (figuratively) to the point of saying which aspect (genre) can hardly do without the other. The bottom line is that the intention of the author is more important than the method of executing the intention.

It would be inconsiderate and unrealistic to rule out an element of history in the book of Chronicles altogether. However, the quality and reliability of this kind of history must be determined and exposed. Jonker (2006:864) highlights that the historical nature of the book has been under scrutiny to the point where some theologians consider the '... unique theology and method of Chronicles.' Collins (2004:458) states, 'The last years of Judah are narrated more briefly in Chronicles than in 2 Kings.' This period of history does not seem to be far from the lifetime of the author(s). One could ask why the Chronicler would be so brief about something that had not been so far in his past. This element of being so brief about history may indicate that history is not the thrust of the book of Chronicles.

Nobody has said or may ever say that there are no historical contents in the book of Chronicles, but it might be that history is used to communicate messages and not that messages are used to communicate history. Kalimi (2005:29-30) regards the book as historical in nature, and the Chronicler as a historian. The author (2005:32) further indicates that the Chronicler does explain or interpret some historical facts as a fundamental historian would and asserts,

‘Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that these features do not automatically make the book of Chronicles a reliable historical composition or its author a “scientific historian”’ The author (2005:33) is very bold in defending something that fails to stand up due to obvious shortcomings with regard to historical correctness. The author (2005:33) says that even if one regards the book as ‘bad history’ because of its historical incorrectness ‘... it is still historiographical in intent and literary nature.’ One could ask what the sense of the insistence of Kalimi (2005:33) on failing and weak propositions might be. It could not be possible for a ‘Chronicler’ to fall short of the requirements of sound historiography if he meant to write history with many historical sources at his disposal. The sources that the Chronicler uses cannot be better than his book if he intends to write history. In fact, the author of Chronicles does not insist on following historical details; instead, he refers to other sources for details that he leaves out purposely.

Succinctly, McKenzie (2010:1) expresses his opinion on historical books as follows: ‘The term “Historical books” in reference to a portion or portions of the Bible is unfortunate. It is unfortunate, first of all, because it is difficult to determine which books fall into this category and why.’ The author truly highlights that some biblical books are categorised by faith communities or Christians in particular and postulates, ‘There is a good chance that Jewish readers will not even find the category Historical Books in their Bibles.’ In furthering the argument, the author indicates that Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings are categorised particularly as former prophets in the Jewish canon. The history contained in the book of Chronicles is but a vehicle of conveying the messages to the post-exilic community in their dire need.

A deliberate repetition of history by the author of Chronicles is highly unlikely, especially in the light of the existence of various historical sources cited in the book. Therefore, the history contained in the book is unique, since some negative details are deliberately left out and the dividing line between Judah and Israel is somewhat faint allowing a choice of crossing from Israel to Judah.

3.2.3.2 Theology

The proponents of a historical genre for the book of Chronicles find it hard to rule out the existence of theology in the book. Generally, the Bible is one of the major sources of theology. The question to consider is whether theology can be a norm in genre classification. In this context, one could ask whether Bible authors really went through training for writing literature or were their main concern conveying messages. The normal thing about almost all pieces of biblical literature is the expression of a theological message. According to McKenzie (2010:12), 'the main concern of the Bible's "Historical Books" is not to describe exactly what happened in the past but to provide explanations from the past for Israel's self-understanding.' The author adds, 'Thus, in the Bible, as in ancient Greek literature, history was written for an ideological purpose. History writing was theology.' Suffice it to say, Bible students should seek theology in the Bible as opposed to history, even though some historical facts may be gleaned from some of the biblical literature.

The scholarly debate about the genre of the book of Chronicles has created an atmosphere of defence that seeks to negate and water down opposing views in order to sustain upheld propositions. Kalimi (2005:25-26) refutes the notion that the Chronicler presents theology by emphasizing that the author does not explain the original contents of earlier sources and thus disqualifies himself from being a proper exegete. The author further says that the Chronicler does not explain some texts that require interpretation and that the style of Chronicles is different from that of earlier sources. For these reasons, the Chronicler is probably not an exegete. The other point that the author (2005:25-26) raises is that the writer of Chronicles actually omitted some texts in his comments on events; consequently, it is improbable that he is a commentary writer. However, one can respond to Kalimi that not all commentators comment on every text, even in our days, and the writer of Chronicles never intends to explain or interpret all existing and canonical texts. Kalimi (2005:27-29) goes on to argue that the idea of the writer of Chronicles being a theologian that writes theology seeks to excuse the historical inaccuracies of the book of Chronicles. The author asserts that the intention of the Chronicler is to write history that is secular in nature. The sections to follow on the messages and the

audience of the book of Chronicles will dispel the notion that Chronicles is about secular Jewish history.

There are scholars that actually recognise the theological nature of the book of Chronicles. Not almost anything that has a clear Deuteronomic character is really duplication, but theology. Arnold and Beyer (2008:253) properly present the work of the writer of Chronicles as theology saying, 'the Books of Chronicles contain traces of nearly every theological concept expressed in the rest of the Old Testament canon.' Furthermore, the authors (2008:254), correctly state, 'The author of Chronicles did not contradict the earlier histories or refute their faithfulness.' The scholars (2008:254) further explains that the innovative use of existing biblical records to document the revelations of God in Israel addressed the requirements of the Persian period readers. Japhet (2004:122) regards the work of the writer of Chronicles as '... exegesis of written scriptures characterised by midrashic features' Throntveit (2008:128) finds some references to the Torah, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, some Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Zephaniah and Zechariah and concludes, 'In this way, Chronicles anticipates aspects of contemporary "inner-biblical" exegesis.' The book of Chronicles is a unique book that refers to texts of other earlier books in the same way that some texts in the New Testament refer to older biblical texts. The book of Chronicles, positioned at the end of the Old Testament canon, makes a good transition to the New Testament writing style, in which reference to earlier writings or texts occur. Briefly, the book of Chronicles ushered in a practice of informed or researched religious writing.

In 2 Chronicles 13:20, the writer writes about the death of Jeroboam and says that he died because God struck him. This sounds like an interpretation just like other interpretations of events in the Bible. Furthermore, in 2 Chronicles 36:21, the exile is referred to as a Sabbath according to indications in an earlier text that stipulates that should Israelites sin they would be subjected to foreign rule and an exile experience. This would result in a Sabbath rest condition of the land of Israel. The author of Chronicles evidently interprets historical events using other texts for consumption by the community of the post-exilic era. The author of Chronicles is more inclined to write about divine revelations in history than history itself. Japhet (1993:5)

articulates it thus: 'The Chronicler has a much broader perspective of the fortunes of Israel, and his orientation is towards a promising future. The strongest conviction for the realisation of this future is anchored in his particular understanding of history as divine revelation.'

Theology cannot be refuted in the book of Chronicles. Boshoff (2005:6) concludes, 'In a sense the books of Chronicles are theological books.' The author (2005) continues to emphasise:

'The history in 1 and 2 Chronicles was not a history as we know histories today. In the first place, the Chronicler was not a historian, but a theologian. He was not so much interested in exactly what happened in the past. His main interest was to convey a message about God to the faithful of his time.'

The book should be judged on its theological consistency and not its historical correctness.

3.2.3.3 *Diverse genre*

In the interest of understanding the messages of the book of Chronicles, it might be necessary to accommodate all kinds of genre classifications of the book. Perhaps neither the historical nor the theological genre classifications may define the genre of the book completely, but other peripheral genres deserve to be considered and embraced.

Japhet (2004:122) figures out that another important genre that may be applicable to the book of Chronicles is a lectionary book composed of sermons to be read aloud in worship services. Schniedewind (1995:252) says in agreement, 'The Chronicler was a messenger exhorting a new generation using the history of Israel for examples in his extended historical sermons.' Sermons are expected to be prepared through a process of exegesis, but many sermons preached are based on shallow exegesis or none at all; therefore, written sermons may be treated as a genre separate from theology and not as part of theological writing or Midrash.

Arnold and Beyer (2008:253) succinctly stress, 'The Chronicler produced what we may call the first commentary on the scriptures.' The author goes on to explain that the Chronicler knew about the misfortunes of the past and did not need to be reminded of these 'failures.' Coogan (2006:448) declares, 'Chronicles is thus not just a revision of the already existing Deuteronomic History, but a genuinely independent work, with its own perspective on Israel's past.' Japhet

(2004:115) says that the book of Chronicles is meant for study purposes and not for the kind of reading as in the case of other books of the Bible. Truly, even though the book of Chronicles may look like part of the books of Kings, it is a book different from all other books in the whole Old Testament canon, because it freely uses texts of older biblical books and some non-canonical books about Old Testament history or kings. The apparent historical information in Chronicles is not written for pure recording, but in an attempt to interpret some past revelations and to highlight the correct way of doing things, while emphasising past national or royal afflictions due to disobeying God.

3.2.4 Authorship

The question of who the writer of the book of Chronicles was is one of the highly contested subjects in the introductory approach to the book of Chronicles. Since the answer to the question of the authorship of the book of Chronicles is not available in the internal evidence of the book, the debate is not about informing belief or academic position, but more about information and perceptions in balancing the discerning equilibrium.

3.2.4.1 Tradition

It is an undisputed fact that Jewish tradition ascribes the authorship of the book of Chronicles to Ezra as highlighted by Arnold and Beyers (2008:252). However, Japhet (2004:118) tries to create common ground for tradition and academic dispute over the authorship of Chronicles being attributed to Ezra by saying that the author might be anonymous, but that Ezra could be the editor instead of the author.

3.2.4.2 Relation with Ezra-Nehemiah

Due to the traditional view that Ezra wrote the books of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles, scholarly debate cannot ignore this claim when dealing with the authorship of the book. Gottwald (2009:298) treats the book of Chronicles in relation with Ezra-Nehemiah. He says that the book of Ezra-Nehemiah was included in the Hebrew canon, but that Chronicles was just an additional historical version that was finally ‘... tacked on to the end of the writings.’ McKenzie (2010:20) points out, ‘The Babylonian Talmud ... records the traditional view that Chronicles

and Ezra-Nehemiah were written by Ezra.’ Ackroyd (1991:350) is not convinced that the book of Chronicles relates to Ezra-Nehemiah and argues, ‘The discussion of linguistic evidence for uniting or separating Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah have on the whole, reached an inconclusive position.’ Hamilton (2001:478) imposes a relationship in elaborating on the authorship of Chronicles by saying that those who argue for a separate authorship of Chronicles and Ezra ‘affirm that both authors were part of a single tradition or school.’ The prominence of Ezra in the post-exilic era might inform the tradition in the same way as the prominence of Moses in the Torah informs the assumption that he wrote the whole Torah.

However, there are authors that dispute the notion that Ezra-Nehemiah relates with Chronicles. Leading the argument against a common authorship or relationship of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah is Japhet (1993:4), who declares the following: ‘Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah constitute two different works by two different authors. Not only do they illustrate an array of small and large differences – in language, style, literary methods.’ De Vries (1989:11) asserts:

‘Since we cannot accept the view that Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah are a single work, or are even by a single author, and since the historical and canonical relationship between the two corpora remain uncertain, it is aimless to pick out items that the two have in common, such as their mutual emphasis on the theocracy and the priesthood as constituting a joint program.’

Schniedewind (1995:249) concludes, ‘It is no longer possible to hold a simple view of a single author for Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah’ There might be no consensus regarding the relationship between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, but the traditional view of one author is no longer prevalent in scholarly realms.

3.2.4.3 Different author

Since it is difficult to attribute the authorship of the book of Chronicles firmly to Ezra, some authors have tried to figure out a different author in the light of the lack of internal evidence of the actual author of the book. Japhet (1993:5) poignantly states: ‘This diversity and in particular the combination of historical records on the one hand and lists of every kind and form on the other, is found by some scholars to be irreconcilable in one author and to suggest different author-personalities from the outset.’ The author suggests the possibility that a Deuteronomist

school of thought was the original author and that a Priestly school of thought later added material or altered the contents of the book. However, the author (1993) prefers to regard the book of Chronicles as the work of one author, in view of its ‘... very distinct and peculiar literary method.’ McKenzie (2010:21-22) concurs with Japhet on the author of the book being someone other than Ezra, because of linguistic differences, ideology and theology. The spirit of the argument that advocates a different authorship embraces the possibility of contributions by various writers. The argument against the authorship of Ezra is reasonable, but not adequate until the argument can isolate and point out who the probable writers were, if they had been more than one.

3.2.4.4 *Unnamed author(s)*

Due to the lack of evidence from the contents of the book, the language, writing style, theology, emphasis on certain points and notable repetitions may assist in trying to identify something about the author. Collins (2004:445) sees the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1-9 as indicators of who the author might be, because the tribe of Judah is given prominence followed by the tribes of Levi and Benjamin. This argument points to the writer(s) being from the tribe of Judah. De Vries (1989:8) sees the authorship of the book of Chronicles to be of the ‘Judean enclave’ excluding any contribution of Diaspora Jews or any Jew from Palestine. According to the author, the writer must have been from Jerusalem and its vicinity. Japhet (2004:118) presents the writer of Chronicles to be a person who is accused of Judaizing the history of Israel, thus pointing to a Jewish authorship. Of course, the writer of the book of Chronicles says very little about the history of the northern kingdom of Israel. Surely, the authorship of the book of Chronicles is of Jewish origin.

Coogan (2006:447) goes beyond the tribal determination of the writer(s) of the book of Chronicles and points out that the author uses Deuteronomic history as sources, namely information contained in 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings, the Pentateuch and some extra-biblical sources. This point alludes to a Deuteronomic authorship of Chronicles. Graham (1998:210) says, ‘... Levitical circles in Jerusalem are responsible for the composition ... by its strong focus on Jerusalem and its temple and the elevated importance of the Levites in the work.’ Dillard

and Longman (1994:171) consider the possibility of the writer being one person, even though some redaction and explanation may have taken place after the initial writing. This one person could have been a Levite, though there is no name attached. Crossley (2002:349) thinks, 'The content suggests a priestly authorship ...' that '...functioned like a research historian drawing on a considerable range of material.' Priestly or Levitical authorship is the same thing and very much closer to the authorial style and expression, even though the author is unnamed. There may be disputes about other aspects, but not on this aspect of the writer being a temple servant, no matter in what position. After all, even Ezra was a priest. The subjects communicated to the audience and the messages regarding the book of Chronicles can be harmoniously approached with the common understanding of the temple area being the original place of the composition and authorship of the book of Chronicles.

3.2.5 Date of authorship

The very first few chapters of the book of Chronicles make it obvious that the entire book was written after the exile. 1 Chronicles 5:22 states the following: 'For many fell down slain, because the war was of God. And they lived in their places until the captivity.' Furthermore, 1 Chronicles 9:1 says the following: 'So all Israel enrolled themselves. And, behold, they were written in the book of the kings of Israel. And Judah was exiled to Babylon for their transgression.' Person (2010:23) emphasises, 'Deuteronomic History is an exilic work that makes extensive use of pre-exilic sources and the Chronicler's work is a post-exilic ... work that updates its source material from the Deuteronomic History and other earlier works.' If any argument exists about the date of the book, it would only be acceptable if such a date falls in the post-exilic era.

3.2.5.1 Persian period

The decree of Cyrus determining the Jews should be released to go and rebuild the temple was issued in 457 BCE. Prior to the decree, willing Jews were not restored to their temple and city of Jerusalem. However, Crossley (2002:350) claims that the book of Chronicles was written immediately after the exile in 538 BCE. Dyck (1998:77) says that the author of the book of Chronicles lived in the Persian period and was a compatriot of the author of the books of Ezra

and Nehemiah. Schniedewind (1995:249) intimates, 'It seems that the preeminent role of the temple in Chronicles best fits into the early Persian period.' Ben Zvi (2001:60) regards the author as a Yehudite historian, thus upholding the Persian date of authorship. The inclination to accept an early Persian period of authorship needs to be realistic enough as to allow time for Jewish regrouping and reorganisation. Writing such a piece of literature could not be among the first things undertaken by the returnees in their hometown. Collins (2004:458) highlighting the reference to Cyrus, King of Persia, in the book of Chronicles, is quite specific and dates the authorship of the book around 400 BCE in view of the 'extension of David's genealogy in chapter 3'

3.2.5.2 *Later date*

A later date suggested for the authorship of Chronicles is around the end of the Persian regime and the beginning of the Grecian regime. However, Ackroyd (1991:9) takes an extreme stance and says that the work may even be dated in the second century BCE. Boshoff (2005:6) claims: '1 and 2 Chronicles were written after the Jewish community was resettled in Jerusalem. The temple was rededicated and Yahweh was worshiped in the temple again. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt and once again it was a city populated by Yahweh's chosen people.' The author (2005:8) reasons that the date could fall in the time from the end of the Persian period up to the beginning of the early Hellenistic era, i.e. the date would specifically be 'around 330 BCE or even later.' Japhet (1993:27) also figures out a later date thus: 'My own conclusions, then, point towards a later rather than earlier date for the book's composition. I would place it at the end of the Persian or, more probably, the beginning of the Hellenistic period, at the end of the fourth century B.C.E.'

The need for such a literature would surely be late or overdue by the end of the Persian regime in view of the need to embrace the reality of a destroyed city and temple. Furthermore, there was need to believe that restoration was still possible as God had promised. The returnees were in dire need of an explanation of the reasons for their subjugation to the Babylonian Empire. The roadmap to the reconstruction of the Jewish nation and cult could be availed in the remembrance of the glory of the Davidic and Solomonic reigns as enshrined in the book of

Chronicles. The book of Chronicles could also help in retrospective reflection of where the nation went wrong to deserve being ruled by foreigners, the Babylonians. The literature was probably needed in the process of rebuilding and reorganising even before the end of the Persian regime.

Collins (2007:235) posits the following arguments: 'The language of Chronicles is generally regarded as Late Biblical Hebrew ... There is no trace of Hellenistic influence that would point to a date later than the fourth century B.C.E.' Likewise, Grabbe (2006:98) finds no justification for a Hellenistic date by indicating that the book does not seem to be concerned with Grecian issues. The most preferred date for this work is anywhere between a post-exilic and pre-Hellenistic date, because of the relevance of the messages of the book of Chronicles to the community of the returnees, who were largely the elite that had been exiled to Babylon. The Hellenistic period is not suitable for the authorship of the book since the book does not say anything about the end of the Persian regime.

3.2.6 Addressees

The audience of the messages of Chronicles was essentially a new community. This community had been subjected to bad experiences in the past including an exile, a dysfunctional cult and a frustrated royalty. The northern kingdom of Israel had been scattered and displaced by the Assyrians long ago. The returnees had to resume their key role in managing the affairs of the nation, also because they had access to the royal house of Persia.

3.2.6.1 General post-exilic audience

There is no dispute about the audience or date of the book being post-exilic as indicated by the contents of the book. De Vries (1989:10) considers the book of Chronicles together with the books of Ezra-Nehemiah and intimates, 'Both works reflect the culture and theology of post-exilic Judaism.' Schniedewind (1995:252) posits, '... the Chronicler's voice speaks to his post-exilic audience.' It is clear that the book of Chronicles was written after the exile for the Jews of the time.

Hamilton (2001:480) contrasts the book of Chronicles with the book of Deuteronomy and explains that they 'retell an earlier story already recorded, but in a different context and to a different audience.' The author (2001:478) sees the message of the book to have been addressed to the Jews that had been in exile in Babylon. To be specific, the message seems to be largely cut out for the returnees. This is also manifested by the genealogy of Judah being presented first, even though not Judah but Reuben was the first-born, according to Hamilton (2001:484). However, the writer (2001:485) highlights the coverage of the history of Benjamin, which includes the first Israelite monarch, Saul, as a factor that may indicate that the Benjaminites are also still regarded as legitimate Jews who needed recognition. Jonker (2006:866) claims that there is academic agreement that the book was written for the Jews of the 'late-Persian or early Hellenistic province of Yehud.' The author goes on to figure out an allusion to a 'multiple' audience for the book of Chronicles. The author also cites the changing circumstances and the process of 'identity formation' as reasons for the inference that the book was intended for a wider audience. The author defines the wider audience as a secondary audience that could have been the Persians in Judah and Samaria (2006:874). The reason for the so-called intended wider audience could have been that the writer of the book of Chronicles wanted to promote the assimilation of new proselytes and to inform the Persian leaders about the supremacy of God.

The book of Chronicles is Jewish literature written primarily for Jews in the post-exilic period. However, the suggested authorship date of the book, as indicated in the earlier section on the dating of the book, may be later than the time that the actual audience lived. Accepting that the audience is post-exilic is not enough, for the exact period with consideration of the Empire of the time is very important.

3.2.6.2 Unique audience

Boshoff (2005:5) evaluates the Judean need for a book like Chronicles thus: 'The newly established Judean community needed guidance to orientate themselves in their new situation. Nothing could answer this need better than a book on their history.' The author goes on to argue, 'These historical books were written to help a new generation to make sense of their

history, and to instil a sense of pride in who they were.’ Dillard and Longman (1994:173) deem the addressees of the book to be different from those of the book of Kings and say they – the addressees –were grappling with various questions including the question of whether the Jews were still God’s people or not. The authors put forward, ‘So the Chronicler prepares yet another history of the nation, one that addresses a different set of questions than those that influenced kings.’ Kalimi (2005:37-38) echoes the sentiment that the audience was unique and needed a unique message. He concludes that the message ‘... was attuned to contemporary, local and new historical circumstances.’ The uniqueness of the audience helps identify the relevant date of the audience that was not from the late Persian or early Hellenistic era, but from an earlier time.

3.2.6.3 Returnees

It is clear that the book was intended for a post-exilic and unique Jewish community, but that is not enough for a proper understanding of the book. Some Jews were never exiled, especially the poor Jews. Was the book really intended for all the Jews or not necessarily? Snyman (2010:819) expresses his opinion: ‘It is clear Chronicles supplanted a Deuteronomist version of the history of Israel. The audience would be part of this supplanting society, and the book could have been written for self-consumption, given the few people who inhabited Jerusalem at that specific time.’ The author (2010:805) is very specific about the audience of the book by saying, ‘His audience was not the general population in Jerusalem, but rather members of the elite, namely the political and religious leadership in Jerusalem.’ The book was meant for the returnees of the elite ancestry that had been in exile in Babylon. Throntveit (2008:126) indicates that this community lived under the kingship of Cyrus, the emperor of Persia, since 539 BCE. As it has already been pointed out, the returnees who had been taken into exile were composed of the royal and cult officers. The emperor of Persia, Cyrus, issued a decree for the Jews to go and rebuild their temple and worship their God, not to go and re-establish their monarchy. However, it is not sufficient to know that the audience of the book were the elite, but the audience must be identified from among the elite themselves in order that we, the current readers of the book, will understand it even better.

3.2.6.4 Levites

The returnees were allowed to fully reconstruct and reconstitute their cult. The message of the book would be relevant in the Persian regime if it would be cult-related and not royalty-related. Boshoff (2005:8) identifies the primary audience of the book of Chronicles as the temple servants, the Levites, and postulates, 'The Chronistic History is an instrument in the reconstruction of the religious community in Jerusalem after the exile.' However, the author (2005:9) continues to explain that the book is not about Zadokitism propaganda, but that it recognises all Levitical services, such as gate keeping and singing in the cultic site. Japhet (2004:121) posits, 'The most influential attempt was made by von Rad, who classified addressees of the Chronicles as "Levitical sermons"' This research upholds the idea that the book of Chronicles was written by Levites, specifically for Levites, who had been in exile in Babylon and who were now rebuilding the temple in a time of dire need. The Levites were the key people in restoring the Jewish cultic place in the life of the Jews. The Jews needed to learn from former good experiences and understand why some things actually happened so that they could outgrow the immense discouragement of the time.

3.2.7 Messages

Graham (1998:202) subdivides the contents of the book thus: 'Chronicles divides neatly into four parts: 1 Chronicles 1-9, genealogies; 1 Chronicles 10-29, the reign of David; 2 Chronicles 1-9, the reign of Solomon; 2 Chronicles 10-36, the reigns of the kings of Judah from Rehoboam to Zedekiah.' The subdivisions seem to be historical at first glance, but they are filled with important messages communicated in such a way that they have the appearance of history. Kalimi (2005:19) emphasises that the 'intention' of the writer of any literature should be known in order to understand the contents. The author (2005:22-24) continues to regard the message of the book of Chronicles to be more about 'Midrash' than history. The burden of the author seems to be all about giving the right understanding, as an exegete, of the historical information available.

3.2.7.1 History of Judah

Those who see the book of Chronicles as a historical book find it to be more about the history of Judah than the history of Israel as a whole. Collins (2007:232) and Ben Zvi (2001:46) agree that one of the intentions of the book is to tell about the history of Judah. Ben Zvi (2001:48) continues to explain that the book of ‘... Chronicles removes anything that might suggest that the northern kingdom as a polity was comparable to Judah in theological ... terms.’ In the genealogy section of the book of Chronicles, Dorsey (1999:145) sees Judah being presented as superior, since it is the royal tribe and the major tribe in the south. Even though Judah and Israel have a common origin, the history presented in Chronicles separates the two kingdoms altogether. The south and the north could not reconcile as equal parties. The northern people would have to join Judah or be swallowed by Judah.

The genealogies of Judah and Benjamin are presented twice in 1 Chronicles 2, 4, 7 and 8, while the genealogies of the northern tribes are not repeated. David is presented as the most important character in the history of Judah, since even his father is not mentioned in the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 3. The history of Judah is not the only theme of the book, even though it may be accepted as one of the themes.

3.2.7.2 Knowledge of God

The experience of the nation of Judah from its origin is characterised by the revelations of God throughout their history. Reflecting on a history of glorious revelations of God and the retribution of God can be somewhat confusing. However, the history contained in Chronicles is not primarily about what happened in the past, but about God’s role and action.

3.2.7.3 God’s actions and conditions

Dorsey (1999:252) presents, among other things, the justification of God’s actions in the history of Judah. Ben Zvi (2001:39) says that the Chronicler ‘... was mainly interested in communicating the social and theological significance of Israel’s history’ The main thing not understood is the fact that God allowed the Babylonians to overcome them, to destroy the temple and the palace and to displace their monarchy. Dever (2006:374) portrays the exilic experience as God’s

judgement against the Jews' rebellion. Dyck (1998:80) explains that the exile was predicted and imposed by God to prevail for 70 years and says the 70 years period means '... a long period of time in comparison to other shorter time estimates.' God did not forsake Judah, but chose extraordinary means to rebuke his nation.

3.2.7.4 *Retribution*

McKenzie (2010:122) presents another aspect of punishment, which he calls 'immediate retribution'. Examples are the story of King Saul and his rejection and the negative rewards of unrighteous kings who erred and had to bear the punishment of God accordingly. Arnold and Beyer (2008:258) call this kind of discipline the 'immediacy of punishment.' Schniedewind (1995:251) postulates, '... the Chronicler's narratives are arranged around the theme of retribution theology.' The author goes on to say the writer of Chronicles employs such a theology to elucidate the experience of the exile and the restoration to their homeland. The use of Babylonians is not the first punishment that God metes out on either the king or the nation. Thus, the narratives of the experiences of the kings of Judah when they disobeyed are intended to comfort the Jews and help them believe that retribution will not last forever and that it is not the end of the relationship between God and his people.

3.2.7.5 *Attributes of God*

The fear of a permanent change in the relationship of God with his people is one of the major fears of his people in the book of Chronicles. Dever (2006:366-370) elaborates on the character of God and emphasises, among other things, the greatness and goodness of God. The author highlights that the LORD has no one equal to Him and that He is amazing and deserves worship. Moreover, God's goodness is explained by His faithfulness, justice and kindness. The crux of the message in Chronicles about the attributes of God is that God has not changed, but something has changed in Judah's faithfulness.

3.2.7.6 *Judah's institutions*

The major message of the book of Chronicles relates to the work of the Levites in Jerusalem and the relationship of the clergy with the royalty. Freedman (1961:88) finds, among other things,

the institutions of Judah as one of the major messages of Chronicles and articulates that the Chronicler ‘... is concerned with the divinely appointed institutions and duly authorised personnel which administer them on behalf of the people of Israel.’ The author points out, ‘Thus, his interest focuses on the kingdom of Judah, its capital city Jerusalem, and at the very center the temple....’ According to the explanation of the author (1961:89), the major purpose of the Chronicler is to address matters that concerned Levites or the cult. At the heart of the message of Chronicles is a yearning for the restoration of the Davidic Dynasty and the Zadok priesthood (1961:91). In comparison to other themes, more space is devoted to these two institutions in the book of Chronicles.

3.2.7.7 The royalty

The royalty might have not been allowed to be restored during the time of the Persian Empire. However, even the governors – such as Nehemiah – of the province of *Yehud* were supposed to be of the lineage of David only. Chisholm (2006:118) says that the account of Chronicles on history complements that of the books of Samuel and Kings. The author postulates the following: ‘Chronicles focuses on the Davidic dynasty and consequently the kingdom of Judah. Overall, its historical portrait is more optimistic than what we find in Samuel-Kings.’ The author (2006:119) says that the record of David’s reign is ‘sanitised’ in order to portray David as an ideal king. Coogan (2006:449) also agrees that David’s reign is presented as a model regime. The opinion of McKenzie (2010:120) is that the reigns of David and Solomon are conveyed as two segments of the same regime.

Freedman (1961:89) succinctly explains the historical presentation of the reign of David as the regime that made positive contributions to the cultic services. David was involved in organizing the Levites in the cultic area, according to 1 Chronicles 13 and 16. Solomon was also involved in building and dedicating the temple (2 Chronicles 2-8) after he had inherited an organised cult service from his father, David. The ideal nature of the royalty of David and Solomon were manifested in their positive contribution to the cultic area.

3.2.7.8 The cult

The cult, where Levites and priests were serving, was the major entity of Jewish life. This institution of the Jews was the pride of the Jews and the writer, a Jew or Jews, of the book of Chronicles wrote for fellow Levites. McKenzie (2010:119) asserts the following: 'Chronicles is really a history of the Jerusalem temple and those who are devoted to it... But if there is a single main theme to Chronicles, it is certainly the temple, its cult, and its personnel.' Kalimi (2005:38) concurs with McKenzie in the view of the services of the priests as one of the central themes. Collins (2007:234-235) points out that the emphasis of the book is on the responsibility of clergy and their work in the temple. Japhet (1993:45) figures out that the concept of the centralisation of the cultic activity as it occurred during the reigns of David and Solomon is one of the major messages of the book. Jonker (2002:394) says that the Jewish cult was the core of Judaism or the Jewish community of the post-exilic era.

Almost every theme found in the book of Chronicles relates to the cult, if correctly understood. The cultic services that were reorganised are the major focus in the book. Judah as a whole is not the focus of the writers who jotted down the words in the book. The feasts, sacrifices and liturgy were to be resuscitated and therefore the necessary rules stipulated and practiced before had to be documented for all the Levites, including those who were born in exile and those who were probably exiled while very tender in age. Teaching the law was very necessary at that time; therefore, the book of Chronicles served as a commentary for Levites or all the elite of that time.

3.2.7.9 Reconstruction

It is noticeable that some historical details are not found in the book of Chronicles. Most of the wrongdoings of David and Solomon are omitted. The main aim was not to rewrite, but to address the matter at hand, which was reconstituting the cultic services without unnecessary historical distractions. Hanson (1986:300) describes the book of Chronicles as '... a historical narrative written in support of the restoration program, and especially of the temple-rebuilding aspect of that program under the leadership of the Davidic prince Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua.' The author (1986:301) continues to say that one of the messages of the

Chronicler is his explanation of the expectations in the reconstruction of the Jewish life. Ben Zvi (2001:51) explains the historical inadequacies or incorrectness thus ‘... it is important to notice that Chronicles shows theologically motivated omissions, emendations, additions, explanations and the like....’

The thrust of the book of Chronicles is theology in a reconstructive context and not history. Almost every scholar interested in the book of Chronicles can find some theological concepts in the book, but the difference is whether the main objective of the writer of the book is deemed as history or theology. Figuratively, the book is a theological tree that bears theological fruits and not a historical tree bearing theological fruits. The primary concern is theology for the cultic servants in Jerusalem.

3.3 Ezra and Nehemiah

3.3.1 Introduction

The introduction of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah is fascinating in that it is difficult to treat them as two books without a challenge. The historicity of Ezra and Nehemiah is one of the issues that have been raised in scholarly realms. Holmgren (1987:xvi) posits: ‘Ezra is often called “the Father of Judaism,” a title that is justified by his work in the 5th century BCE.’ It is thought provoking that the historicity of a character that deserves such a title may be questioned. As to who he was, Bandstra (2004:465) explains that he was a Zadokite priest and a scribe, and consequently, a ‘royal administrator....’ The author continues to indicate that Ezra returned to Judah in 458 BCE. About Nehemiah, Bandstra (2004:467) states, ‘Nehemiah was an official at the court of Artaxerxes I in Susa and probably a eunuch.’ The writer goes on to explain that Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem in 445 BCE, which was about 13 years after the arrival of Ezra. For some time, he worked together with Ezra.

3.3.2 Superscription

Dorsey (1999:158) emphasises the fact that Ezra-Nehemiah had been one book in the Hebrew Bible. The process of translating the Hebrew Bible into other languages did not necessarily

transmit the book of Ezra-Nehemiah to people of other languages as it appeared in the Hebrew canon. In this case, the length of the contents was not extraordinary, but the understanding of the contents of the book precipitated a division of the book into two books with entirely different titles. Nichol ed. (1976c:319) and Graham (1998:201) point out that prior to its division it was called Ezra. The division seems to have been first effected by Jerome prior to the fifteenth century, according to Graham (1998:201) and Nichol ed. (1976c:319). What may present a problem is that the division into chapters and verses was changed with the division of the book. For reference purposes, the book may be treated as two books, which may facilitate scholarly debate and religious edification.

3.3.3 Place in canon

Bandstra (2004:467) indicates that Ezra-Nehemiah is placed just before Chronicles, the last book of the section, Writings, in the Hebrew canon. However, Graham (1998:202) intimates, 'In the Hebrew, the Palestinian tradition (Aleppo Codex; Leningrad B19 a) places Chronicles at the first and Ezra-Nehemiah at the end of the Writings.' Blenkinsopp (1988:38), probably referring to the conventional or Masoretic manuscripts, explains that the Hebrew book of Ezra-Nehemiah is made up of 685 verses and the middle point is between Nehemiah 3:31 and 3:32. The writer continues to state, 'In LXX Ezra-Nehemiah follows Chronicles ... in accord with the roughly chronological order of the historical books....' With such a possibility Gottwald (2009:298) concurs, and highlights that another factor could be that the book of Chronicles could have been the last to be canonised, hence the last position. The place of the book in the conventional Hebrew canon or the section of Writing does not change the messages of the book, but simply points to the fact that the earlier translations were corrupted and some of the modern translations like English are actually not translations of the original canon. There is need for a translation of the original text in all respects.

3.3.4 Genre

The book Ezra-Nehemiah sounds like history if read without scrutinizing it. The most fascinating thing about the book is the use of the first person pronoun in some passages, which gives it a

biographical character. Williamson (1987:17) says that some scholars figure out that Nehemiah wrote a report to the King of Persia since his adversaries accused him for wrongdoing. The Nehemiah Memoir seems to be a report; however, the author indicates that the biography of Nehemiah seems to be addressed to God and not to the king. Holmgren (1987:xiv-xv) points out that not much is known about Ezra and Nehemiah, 'because the character of these books ... is not that of an exact history.' Brown (2005a:34) indicates that the book of Ezra begins with some historical details that tempt the reader to expect more of chronological flow of thought. However, the writer of the book of Ezra goes back and forth in penning down historical events, especially in the highly fragmented account of the completion of the temple and its dedication. It is unjustifiable to regard the book of Ezra-Nehemiah as a historical book in the light of such a questionable chronological order.

Despite the questionable nature of the chronology of the book, Eskenazi (1988:7) is inclined to regard the book's genre as history. This inclination requires thorough explanation and therefore the author says:

'Material in historiography is shaped for the sake of coherence and meaning by the historians and not simply by the given properties of reality. The paradigm of historiography thus ceases to be that of a work that reproduces events as they actually happened, but becomes suffused with the spirited invention of the writer(s).'

In the world and in religions, there is interest in history research and writing in view of the generations to come. The ideal situation is to employ history writing people who will put events in their sequence as they occur. The reality is that history may never be perfect until historians are actually employed in every sphere of life including religion.

The uniqueness of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah is that in piecing together some events pertaining to the restoration or origin of Judaism, a number of documents are used almost just as they appear in their original format. Blenkinsopp (1988:42) identifies the following sources used in compiling the book: Cyrus' decree, other versions of the decree, a list of temple vessels, a list of repatriates, Rehum's letter to Artaxerxes and the king's response, and Tattenai's letter to Darius and Darius' response. To Brown (1998:15), a source that stands out is the so-called

Nehemiah Memoir. The author continues to say that some 'archival material' might have belonged to the temple. It is clear that the book of Ezra-Nehemiah was written when literacy was not a problem and access to different kinds of literature was not a hustle. The identified sources clearly tell that the book of Ezra-Nehemiah is more of a compilation of various sources as building blocks, with some necessary and relevant explanations in putting the materials together. It is fascinating to learn that this book is more of an unrefined compilation than a composition. Probably, the idea was to keep the information enshrined in the sources together as one document, which was meant to be canonised for the preservation of the information. Overall, the book is a compilation of pieces of information without presenting them in any particular or strict genre.

3.3.5 Authorship

The division of the original single book into two books complicates the authorship of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah.

3.3.5.1 Division of the book

Since an individual in the process of translating the Bible determined the division of the book into the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, other Bible students might see further probable divisions or sub-divisions of the book. Eskenazi (1988:12) acknowledges that the book was originally one and posits, 'Origen (who acknowledged the unity of Ezra-Nehemiah, saying that they appear "in one") was the first to divide the book into two, and this division was adopted for the Vulgate.' Readers of the Vulgate were supposed to be concerned with issues of the unity of the products that resulted from the splitting of the same book, but not the rest of Bible readers or students in the whole world.

Bandstra (2004:463-467) concludes that the division was reasonable but not complete. The author divides the book thus: Book of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6), Ezra Memoir (Ezra 7-10) and Nehemiah Memoir (Nehemiah 1-7 and 10-13). The author (2004:465) points out, 'There is a gap of about sixty years between the events of the Book of Zerubbabel and that of the Ezra Memoir.' This is a good observation that complies with a gap between Nehemiah 7 and 10. This

simply demonstrates that the attempt to divide the book in the first place was not well planned and that it would be better to have one book as it had been introduced into the Hebrew canon.

Dorsey (1999:158) divides the book differently in the following way: Zerubbabel's return and the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 1-6), Ezra's return and his accomplishments (Ezra 7-10) and Nehemiah's return and his work (Nehemiah 1-7:3). This division leaves Nehemiah 7:4 to chapter 13 unclassified. This still indicates that a move in the wrong direction cannot be justified or improved. The book of Ezra-Nehemiah should be treated as one book.

3.3.5.2 Unity of Ezra-Nehemiah

The division of the book Ezra-Nehemiah into two books, Ezra and Nehemiah, resulted in a scholarly debate on the unity of the two separate books, either to justify the division or to cast doubt on the singular authorship of Ezra-Nehemiah. Coogan (2006:431) states factually, 'In the Hebrew Bible the books of Ezra and Nehemiah form one unit; in Christian Bibles since late antiquity they usually have been divided into two books.' The Old Testament is pure Hebrew or Jewish literature and not Christian literature in its origin. No Christian word or expression is used in the book. The cause of the debate is that non-Jewish people from various backgrounds treat foreign literature as if it were indigenous literature. Steinmann (2010:12-13) indicates that the Jewish tradition treats the books as one and posits, 'The Talmud knows of a book of Ezra, but no book of Nehemiah, since Nehemiah is subsumed under the title "Ezra."' If there had been no book called Nehemiah, the unity debate would not have been existent.

Most scholars find unity in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. An exponent of this view is Karrer-Grube (2008:149), who indicates that the book of Ezra does not end with the final page of the book. The writer states, 'At the end of Ezra 4 one wants to know how things develop further.' The author continues to emphasise, 'If one reads the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as one composition, one becomes aware of two periods in the development of the Judean community: the period of Cyrus and Darius (Ezra 1-6) and the period of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7-Neh. 13).' The books are about one story and not the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah. To Goswell (2010:188) the omission of the name of the king concerned in Nehemiah 1:1 implies that the book of Nehemiah is a continuation of the Ezra narrative. The author (2010:203) continues to argue,

‘Summary verses like Ezra 6:14 also contribute to making the Ezra-Nehemiah a unified narrative with a number of coordinated stages.’ If one approaches Ezra-Nehemiah as one book, the argument of Fried (2008:75) makes good sense. He sees the fact that Ezra only reads the book of the law to the Jews in the section named book of Nehemiah as evidence of unity, because this Ezra’s arrival is documented in the section named Ezra and not in the book where he is portrayed as one reading the book of the law.

Bandstra (2004:463) asserts, ‘The book of Ezra-Nehemiah is a single unit consisting of three identifiable sections, each centered around a significant leader of the restoration’ Eskenazi (1988:13) simply states, ‘I consider Ezra-Nehemiah to be a single work. After considering the points that are said to militate against the unity of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, Eskenazi (1988: 20) concludes, ‘The linguistic evidence available neither proves nor disproves common authorship.’ The claimed linguistic and structural differences of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah do not change the fact that they were introduced into the canon as a unit. The historical knowledge of the readers of the books should not inform the Bible students that the books are not a unit.

3.3.5.3 Unity of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles

There is a notion that the author of the book of Chronicles, who is referred to as the Chronicler, also wrote the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. Bandstra (2004:468) regards Ezra-Nehemiah as a history recorded by the Chronicler and that the book of Chronicles should be one book together with Ezra-Nehemiah. Schmidt (1984:162) agrees that the Chronicler used the Nehemiah Memoir and the Ezra Memoir to write the kind of literature found in the book of Chronicles. To Brown (2005b:179), the Chronicler could have begun the process of writing the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, and later on redactors and editors could have attempted to complete it. Yet, they confused the material such that the original Chronicler’s work would have been better. The assumption that the Chronicler is responsible for writing the book incorrectly called Chronicles is not sufficiently verified to regard the Chronicler as the author of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. If the same author had written Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, he would have probably arranged them in their chronological order. The book of Ezra-Nehemiah is not the last book of

the section, Writings, of the Hebrew Bible; therefore, the author is probably not the same as the author of Chronicles.

Nichol ed. (1976c:319) explains that the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, like the book of Chronicles, is historical in nature and completes the history of Chronicles. Furthermore, the author indicates that Jewish tradition maintains that Ezra wrote the history of the post-exilic era. The author speculates that Nehemiah might only have had the task to complete the historical narration. Graham (1998:204) says that the relationship of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah and the book of Chronicles could not be sustained for long on the grounds of linguistic arguments. Holmgren (1987:xiii) asserts that the author of Ezra-Nehemiah is not the author of Chronicles. Japhet (1993:3) posits, 'The view that one author is responsible for both Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah is the traditional opinion of rabbinical Judaism and medieval Christianity; the composition of both is attributed to Ezra the scribe....' However, the author (1993:5) uses linguistics to argue against common authorship. Ackroyd (1991:275) concludes, 'The work of the Chronicler – 1 and 2 Chronicles is not a complete unity.' Indeed, there is nothing that unites the book of Chronicles with the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, be it genre, the author or the historical period covered.

3.3.5.4 Other authors

The author of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah is generally believed to be either Ezra or the Chronicler. Some scholars decipher some possible important contributors in the authorship of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. Fried (2008:97) claims, 'The story of Ezra 7-Nehemiah 13 seems to have been written by a follower of Ezekiel... He modelled his story after the most important story that he knew, the story of Moses and the covenant at Sinai.' The author (2008:78) continues to argue as follows: 'It must have been an earlier author/compiler then who inserted the list of returnees and the story of the law-reading into Nehemiah Memoir. He prefaced this expanded Memoir with the story of Ezra's bringing the law to Jerusalem in order to motivate the law-reading.'

There is a belief that Nehemiah could have been one of the writers if not the main writer. Brown (1998:16) regards Nehemiah as one of the authors in the Old Testament who wrote his biography. Williamson (1987:15) finds gaps in the account of Nehemiah and concludes, 'This

shows that the Nehemiah source must once have been more extensive than it is now.’ The issue of the Nehemiah Memoir presents Nehemiah as one of the other authors that may be considered. Coogan (2006:432) hints at the use of the first and third person pronouns in the whole account of Ezra-Nehemiah. He regards it as an indication that the writings of these principal characters, Ezra and Nehemiah, might have been used to compile the book. The author of the book is anonymous.

3.3.5.5 Date

It is always difficult to date a book if the author is anonymous. Different scholars give different dates to the book. Brown (1998:14) intimates, ‘Nehemiah provides his narrative with a firm mid-fifth century BC date.’ This is verified by the fact that Nehemiah served the Persian king, Artaxerxes, who ruled from 464 to 424 BCE. According to Coogan (2006:431), ‘The entire work probably was written in the late fifth or early fourth century BCE.’ Bandstra (2004:463) and Nichol ed. (1976c:319) concur that by 400 BCE the book of Ezra-Nehemiah had been completed. However, Throntveit (1989:11) and Holmgren (1987:xiii) regard the author of Ezra-Nehemiah to have worked on the book in 300 BCE. Williamson (1987:45) states, ‘There is no secure method for dating a work such as Ezra and Nehemiah.’ The book of Ezra-Nehemiah is not concerned with the Grecian Empire at all and thus the date of the 300 BCE appears to be extreme. Some time prior to the Grecian Empire would be the most reasonable date for the book.

3.3.6 Addressees

The issue of the date of the book closely relates to its address, because the people of the time of the writing of the book could have been the audience of the message. A reasonable date always allows the Bible student to figure out the audience. Brown (1998:15) treats the first person account of Nehemiah as a report to the Persian king, which makes the king part of the audience of the book. Furthermore, the author (1998:16) says, ‘In outspoken confrontation with oppressively materialistic Judeans, he addresses social questions with the same directness and determination....’ The Jews in Jerusalem may not be ruled out as the audience of the book. Throntveit (1989:11) explains the society to receive the message of Ezra-Nehemiah as those

people who had experienced the promise of restoration and needed to understand its connection with the past. The author further expounds that the community was engaged in the work of reconstruction. These were the Jews in Jerusalem who had been deported or descendants of exiles.

3.3.7 The messages

The books of Ezra-Nehemiah are packed with edifying and doctrinal messages. Brown (1998:17) finds a broad spectrum of historical, moral and spiritual messages in the book. Brown (1998:17) also identifies the doctrines contained in the book to be about God, scripture, prayer and leadership.

3.3.7.1 The doctrine of God

Brown (1998:18) sees the sovereignty of God who rules even in heaven in the account of Ezra-Nehemiah. Brown (2005b:191) zooms in on the sovereignty of God in the context of the tremendous opposition encountered in rebuilding the temple and city walls and posits, 'The narrative argues that God's power is greater than the world's greatest monarchs.' Furthermore, God is presented as a faithful covenant-keeping God (Brown, 1998:18). God is always above the ruling powers and uses them to do his will if necessary. He shows that in the way He used King Cyrus to liberate the exiles to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

3.3.7.2 The doctrine of prayer

Dorsey (1999:161) highlights the importance of prayer in confronting challenges. Brown (1998:22) commenting specifically on the messages of the book of Nehemiah states, 'It begins with prayer in Persia (1:4) and closes with prayer in Jerusalem (13:31).' The author sees Nehemiah as a religious person who hastens to pray and express his troubles, acknowledges his past shortcomings and realises his way forward. The fasting in prayer before the journey back to Jerusalem by Ezra and some fellow Jews (Ezra 8:23) and Nehemiah's fast (Nehemiah 1:4) instil the concept that true leadership leads through prayer or constant connection with God's power in prayer. Religious leaders could experience success if they would approach every

religious or congregational project in prayer as opposed to only seeking monetary resources and skilled persons, and deeming it to be sufficient without God's power.

3.3.7.3 The doctrine of Leadership

Nichol ed. (1976c:322) accentuates the good work and benefits of the leadership characterised by selflessness and fearlessness. The kind of leadership that could play a role in the reformation of the believers is portrayed in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. The courageous leadership of believers bases reforms on scripture and passionately executes the concepts of scripture even under impossible circumstances.

3.3.7.4 The doctrine of scripture

The scripture of the time was the Law of Moses. The building of the altar by Joshua and Zerubbabel and their fellow Jews in Ezra 3:2 was completed in accordance with the Law of Moses. It is interesting that in Ezra 7 the scripture of the time is correctly regarded as the law by the king (Artaxerxes). It seems as if it is the law used in secular realms. In a way, the king believes that it will help his regime to entrench a law-abiding culture among the citizens of his Empire, i.e. among those who dwell in Jerusalem. The mammoth challenge of dealing with exogamy is also confronted from a scriptural point of view (Ezra 10:3). According to Nehemiah 8, Ezra reads the law to the congregation, who weep upon hearing what scripture says. In addition, the feast of tabernacles is revived according to scripture. In Nehemiah 9:3, the reading of scripture is presented as part of the exercise of worship. Finally, it is fascinating that the book of the law is interchangeably referred to as the Law of Moses or the law of God (Nehemiah 8:1, 8). Indeed, reformation and worship should be based on scripture.

3.3.7.5 Restoration

Brown (2005a:36) intimates, 'Historically the book of Ezra gives the primary biblical coverage of Israel's reformation in the post-exilic period.' Nichol ed. (1976c:322) identifies the restoration of the Jews after the exile as one of the messages of the book. Brown (2005b:188) elucidates, '... the expansion of the house of God to encompass not merely the temple, but the city as a

whole.’ The restoration of the Jews would not be complete with the rebuilt temple without a rebuilt city. Furthermore, restoration would include the rest of the practices of the Jewish faith.

3.3.7.6 Other Messages

Dorsey (1999:161) examines the roles played by different persons in God’s work. Examples of such persons are Zerubbabel, fellow returnees, Levites and priests. Nichol ed. (1976c:322) finds fulfilment of the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah in the account of Ezra-Nehemiah. Coogan (2006:433) mentions the disapproval of exogamy, the recommencement of Sabbath observance and the encouragement of tithing and paying tax as other messages of the book. Indeed, the messages of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah are numerous and serve as a good model for reformation and restoration purposes.

3.4 Lamentations

3.4.1 Place in canon

The book of Lamentations, like the book of Chronicles, has been affected by the hands of translators who chose to place it elsewhere in their translations according to their personal insight. Suffice it to say the book was misplaced just after the book of Jeremiah in our conventional Bible versions, while the Hebrew version placed it elsewhere. Parry (2010:18) indicates that the book of Lamentations is one of the Meggiloth (festal) scrolls placed in the following order in the Hebrew Bible: Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations and Esther. The author highlights that this order is in line with their chronological order. The festal scrolls were part of the section Writings, the last section of the Hebrew Bible. The author (2010:19) continues to indicate that as a festal book Lamentations would be used on the ninth of the month Ab to commemorate the Babylonian exile and the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians and later by the Romans. Gerstenberger (2001:467) regards the section of the Writings to be composed of liberally organised, yet significant pieces of literature used in ‘Jewish worship religious instruction....’ The Hebrew version placed the book according to its liturgical significance.

Collins (2004:348) indicates that tradition ascribes the authorship of the book to Jeremiah, but that the Hebrew Bible does not and places it in the section, Writings. Salters (2010:3) says, '...Jerome himself regards it as part of the book of Jeremiah; and Josephus appears to treat both books as one.' It is clear that the association of the book of Lamentations with the book of Jeremiah originates from some Bible students, not Bible writers; therefore, the book should be treated in accordance with its placement among the festal scrolls and not as one of the prophetic writings.

3.4.2 Superscription

Neither the writer nor the redactors gave the book the title of Lamentations. Even through the process of canonizing the Hebrew Bible, the book received no proper title. Hayes (1998:167) says that in the Hebrew Bible the book of Lamentations was not designated as Lamentations of Jeremiah. Nichol ed. (1976c:543) explains that the first word of the first poem or Lament is *ekah* meaning 'how' and the author posits, 'This word is used in the Hebrew Bible as the name of the book.' Salters (2010:2) is of the opinion that the English title, Lamentations, stems from the Vulgate translation. The author (2010:3) continues that in the Hebrew Bible, the first word of the first poem or lament is a poetry marker and not a title. Briefly, the book does not have a title at all and one should treat it as such.

3.4.3 Genre

If there is anything clear about the book, it is that it is poetry. Coogan (2006:382) says that the book is composed of five poems. There is no other kind of genre in the book. Brady (2008:222) indicates that the first four poems of the book are acrostics. An acrostic is a poem in which every line begins with a letter of the alphabet in alphabetical sequence. The final poem is not an acrostic poem. Brady (2008:223) continues to say that the first four poems consist of lines of different length in each stanza and such a style is called '*qinah*.' The genre of the book is incontrovertibly poetry.

3.4.4 Authorship

The authorship of the book of Lamentations, which echoes the sentiment that Judah went into exile, is intriguing, because the writer of the book, according to Brady (2008:222), seems to be a person who was not exiled. If the writer had not written like a mourning person, he or she might not have been a Jew, but the emotional involvement obviously portrays the writer or writers to be Judean. There is no question about the author being a Judean. The question is if he or she could access Jerusalem and did not claim to be the only survivor, why he or she deemed Judah to have been exiled as if literally all the Jews had been taken into exile.

Before attempting to determine who the author of the book was, it must be determined whether a single or multiple authors were responsible for the book. Then it must be decided whether the outcome would be pivotal to understanding the book.

3.4.4.1 Multiple authorship

Japhet (2004:122) points out that there is a notion that the poems of Lamentations 'were composed by Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and king Jehoiachin respectively.' Salters (2010:7, 26) firmly suggests that the authorship of the book was multiple. However, the authorship multiplicity of the book does not seem to indicate that the poems have very different themes, times and contexts. If there had been multiple authors, probably one of them could have served as the final compiler, who could have made certain that the literature would be given a title. The other factor that might suggest multiple authorship of the book is the fact that the fifth poem is not an acrostic poem. One of the poets did not use the same style of poetry; variety was not necessarily forbidden. If it is true that the book was the product of a number of poets, it does not necessarily have any influence on the messages of the book or declare them discordant.

3.4.4.2 Singular authorship

Gottwald (2009:310) posits, 'Similarities of form and content in the first four poems suggest a single author or writers of similar mind and tradition.' Parry (2010:4), without disregarding the possibility of a multiple authorship, simply favours the single authorship of the book and

regards the book as an independent unit. If a singular author had written the poems alone, perhaps it could be a matter of canonised literature not written for public consumption, even though poems of different authors could still have been put together for their contextual and thematic unity.

Why were these poems not incorporated into Psalms? The answer could be that the poems were used for commemorating the destruction of the temple and thus had to be placed among the festal scrolls for special liturgical services. However, some of the Psalms might have been used for particular liturgical services. The probability of the book having been written by a single person does not make the message different compared to a multiple authorship message.

3.4.4.3 Jeremiah's authorship

Since the book has been placed after the book of Jeremiah in conventional Bible versions, the question of Jeremiah being the author has created room for a lot of argument. This is a matter of mere belief, because there is no internal evidence to suggest such a position.

Nevertheless, there is affirmative argument advanced by some scholars. Hayes (1998:167) outlines a number of the reasons for the propagation of the authorship of Jeremiah. The first reason is that Jeremiah often declared that Jerusalem would be defeated and seized. The next reason is there are a number of lamentations in the book of Jeremiah. A third is that it is reported in Chronicles 35:25 that Jeremiah composed laments for King Josiah. Crossley (2002:571) postulates, 'the "weeping prophet" Jeremiah, composes five poems as he grieves over the capital city of Jerusalem.' The author acknowledges that the writer of Lamentations is not mentioned, but '... the content, style, language and circumstances all suit Jeremiah the prophet as tradition maintains.' However, the author sums up his argument by indicating that veracity on the authorship of the book is not of much value since there is no internal evidence of it and 'interpretation does not depend on it.' Nichol ed. (1976c:543-544) supports the authorship of Jeremiah while being aware of some scholarly argument against the conviction. He posits that none of the arguments is conclusive and says, 'Scholars, both critical and conservative, are united in the belief that Lamentations was written in the days of Jeremiah.'

The author goes on to say he accepts the authorship of Jeremiah since it is the belief of rabbis. The authorship of Jeremiah is questionable since he was forcefully carried to Egypt and probably never made it back to Jerusalem. Thus, he would not have had time to meditate upon the destroyed city and temple in order to compose the five poems of Lamentations.

Some scholars properly reason contrary to the belief that Jeremiah is the author of the book of Lamentations. Arnold and Beyer (2008:403) postulate: '... the book does not specifically name Jeremiah as its author.' Gerstenberger (2001:467) reasons from the perspective of the position of the book in the older MSS and points out that the books of Lamentations and Jeremiah are not related. Salters (2010:5) argues that the name of Jeremiah could not have been mistakenly omitted in the book if Jeremiah had been the author. The author (2010:6) considers justification for the authorship of Jeremiah and outlines the factors that explain the authorship of Jeremiah. Yet, he points out that there are vocabulary differences, but at the same time, he ascribes them to probable genre differences. If Jeremiah had been the author, what would separate the lament poems in his book and those that currently constitute the book of Lamentations? Of course, the use of these poems to commemorate the destruction of the temple by Babylonians and Romans could give some explanation, but in contrast to Lamentations, the rest of the books (Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Esther and Song of Songs) of the festal scrolls have either a predominant character or a clear indication of an author. If one takes into account that some poems or songs in the book of Psalms are ascribed to David, why would there be no indication of the name of Jeremiah in the titles of the poems at least? There is no internal evidence to suggest that Jeremiah is the author of the poems.

3.4.4.4 *Anonymous author*

It has been indicated that the above arguments (affirmative and contrary) are not conclusive. There is no clear internal evidence of the author of the book of Lamentations and no consensus on a possible author. Unfortunately, the argument against Jeremiah's authorship is unable to come up with an acceptable name of a writer. Coogan (2006:382) puts forward that since the book of Lamentations is one of the five festal scrolls of the section called Writings in the Hebrew Bible, 'Modern critical scholars, however, generally have concluded that the prophet

was not its author.’ The author (2006:383) continues to say that it is hard to claim that the author of the book is a certain person or not. If no argument prevails, the silence of the book about its authors prevails and it means that the author of the book is anonymous.

3.4.5 Date of authorship

Coogan (2006:383) claims that the book had been written immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem. Parry (2010:5-6) finds all the poems of the book to be pointing to an exilic authorship, especially since the cultic services of the time were characterised by lament liturgy. Collins (2004:348) regards the book as an exilic source written while the experience of mourning was prevalent. Arnold and Beyer (2008:403) point to the date 586 BCE saying, ‘The book reflects the heartache of someone who is still anguished over the vivid scenes surrounding Jerusalem’s fall.’ There is no argument about the probable date of the book being the exilic period, because the contents are clearly about the despair expressed by the writer who had known the beauty of the city of Jerusalem. Truly, no one could mourn the death or destruction of something unknown.

3.4.6 Place of authorship

It is interesting that the book of Lamentations, which was written by either a Levite or persons from the remnant who had access to Jerusalem in its dilapidated state, could be accepted in the Hebrew or Jewish canon after the exile. The reason for this amazement is that Judaism was born in exile and that it did not readily accommodate the remnant in Judah.

Salters (2010:9) figures out that the fact that the book makes no mention of Babylon indicates that it was written in Judah. Albrektson (2010:19) narrows down the scope of searching for an author of the book when pointing out that ‘... their author was familiar with the Zion traditions.’ Parry (2010:4) deems the writer of the book to have been linked with the ‘... royal court, prophetic circles or more commonly, the temple.’ Gottwald (2009:311) states, ‘The writer(s) could have been a prophet, a priest or governmental or a private lay figure.’ The book was written in the destroyed Jerusalem territory by an author who knew the city, because the

author writes explicitly about the city without identifying himself. The poems are definitely not of Diaspora origin or composition.

3.4.7 The addressees

If there might be anything about the book of Lamentations and its audience about which there is no contest, it would be the addressees. Hayes (1998:168) identifies God and Zion as the audience of the book, while Schniedewind (1995:475) intimates: 'God, the receiver of Laments and complaints, is portrayed as a scornful deity, who has either permitted the catastrophe to overcome its people or even actively given his mandate to the enemies castigating his own faithful, destroying his own city and abode.'

It is interesting that it sounds as if the writer of the book of Lamentations is directing his laments and complaints to God. Yet, the book was used as a memorial of the destruction of the temple by Babylon and Rome. Perhaps the poems made the memories vivid enough to dispel complacency and laxity. Nevertheless, God remains the main audience of the book of Lamentations and He is presented as a silent God who might have forsaken His people forever.

3.4.8 Messages

The book of Lamentations is short, yet densely packed with messages to God and God's believers. Gottwald (2009:311) indicates that the poems are said to be personal and communal. In attempting to condense the message of Lamentations, Berlin (2004:17) states, 'God, sin, punishment, repentance, faith, hope – all of these are important concepts in Lamentations and all are the stuff from which a theology is made.' Renkema (2003:428) graphically posits, 'In the darkness of hunger, sickness and death, suffering women and dying children, human failure, repentance, devastation and blood thirsty enemies, abuse and oppression, they long for God's nearness.' Lamentations 1:18 and 3:42 show that the poems refer more to Jerusalem than to Judah. Even when the word Judah is used, it is informed by the condition of Jerusalem. The messages of the book are meant to be received by God and by fellow Jews in a destroyed Jerusalem. All the messages expressed or sent to God are emotional expressions and appeals to God.

3.4.8.1 Emotional expressions

Coogan (2006:382), Harrelson (1964:447) and Gerstenberger (2001:476) find the expression of grief before God as one of the messages of the book. Parry (2010:22-23 and 27) explains that the grief is not about remorse (for sin), but more about how they feel (the pain). Coogan (2006:382) hints at the depiction of Jerusalem by means of metaphors of a dead woman, a widow and a naked woman. These expressions before God sound as if they were intended to extract mercy from Him and to manipulate God not to look at their sins or the causes of such devastation.

The poems express the impression that God is angry; hence, He allowed the city to be destroyed, according to Coogan (2006:382). There is a serious tendency of ignoring facts here, because Jeremiah warned the Jews to submit to Babylon, but they did not take counsel and thus Babylon had to destroy the city and the temple. The insubordination of the Jews caused their devastation, not their sin, because things were never intended to go that far. Dorsey (1999:252) and Parry (2010:24) find one of the messages being the justification of God's act because of the sins of Judah. Furthermore, the angry God is portrayed as a very harsh God whose punishment is harsher than the sins of Judah. These emotional expressions are not fair towards God and the Judeans shirk responsibility for the destruction, because Babylon was forced by the recalcitrance of Judah to destroy the city and the temple. These emotional expressions are characterised by false allegations against God, who is said to be angry. Arnold and Beyer (2008:404) present the emotional perception of the writer thus: 'The author wept as he saw Jerusalem's suffering. Little ones starved to death in their mother's arms while enemies mocked the city's downfall. The dead became food for the living due to the extreme food shortage!'

Judah's provocation of Babylon and their disobedience to Jeremiah's counsel are ignored in presenting God as angry. Indeed, these emotional expressions cannot be trusted at all.

3.4.8.2 Appeal to God

The poems do not only express the feelings of the remnant in the city of Jerusalem, but also petition God to change the situation or relent. One of the major appeals made to God is

confession of sin, according to Dever (2006:616) and Collins (2007:183). The confession of sin is expressed in Lamentations 1:18 and 3:42. The poet understands that the suffering of the people is the result of their sins and so forgiveness would perhaps alleviate their suffering if they could move their compassionate God to change the situation.

The other message to God is a plea to God to end the suffering. Arnold and Beyer (2008:504) explain the writer's plea saying, 'The people asked God to restore them as he had in the past, but behind their petition loomed a frightening question, had God abandoned them forever?' Collins (2007:184) also sees the plea for restoration as the major content of their requests. Harrelson (1964:445) finds that the writer is encouraging the remnant of Judah to appeal to God for help in their desperate situation. This plea for restoration, taken in its context, can only be made to God.

The other appeal made to God in the book is that God would respond to the question, had He forsaken Judah for good? Harrelson (1964:447) hints at the fact that the king of Judah had gone into exile and fuses it with the question whether God had abandoned them forever. Gwaltney (2004:227) presents the question in a context of an argument with the silent God thus: '... punishment aimed at rehabilitation, not at definite rejection.' Parry (2010:33) exposes the motive for the question declaring, 'Yes, God does reject but he does not do so forever.' This is bargaining with God in order to reduce the due discipline. The appeals to God seem to be more about doing anything to attract God's favour so that He would deliver them from the gloomy situation by providing leadership for restoration purposes.

The book of Lamentations bears some messages that are realities or facts that the Jews needed to know and not messages that God needs to know or hear.

3.4.8.3 Results of sin

Harrelson (1964:445) and Parry (2010:21) see the book to be admitting that the suffering and destruction of the city was a result of the sins of Judah. Gottwald (2009:311) says '... the destruction of Jerusalem is seen as a horrible, but deserved punishment because of Israel's enormous sins....' Albrektson (2010:12) in considering the concept of the results finds

justification to hint at ‘... the doctrine of retribution and reward....’ Dillard and Longman (1994:311) indicate that blessings are conditional. The main condition for blessings is covenant keeping or obedience. In this case, Judah had sinned and results of sin were manifest when Babylon overcame Judah.

3.4.8.4 Corporate suffering

This difficult subject, which is mostly hard to accept, is explained in Lamentations 5:7. Though the guilt of sin may be borne by the sinner alone, its consequences tend to affect others too. Judah had to accept this painful reality. Some of the faithful persons like Daniel and his three fellow Judeans were obedient to God, but they still had to bear the consequences of sin. Dillard and Longman (1994:311) comments, ‘... the book of Lamentations grapples with the question of corporate suffering in much the same way as the book of Job struggles with issues of individual suffering.’ The individual should internalise this concept and avoid sinning so that others do not suffer because of his or her sin.

3.4.8.5 God in control

In times of difficulty and gloom, it is easy for people to think that God has given up control of their affairs. The presence of God means that He is in control, because no one can ever ask God to absent Himself from somewhere or something. Lamentations 3:22-23 expresses faith in the presence of God in the midst of disaster. Brady (2008:224) identifies a theme of God’s presence even during the exilic period of a lamenting cult and the destroyed capital city, Jerusalem. To Parry (2010:19), God was in control of all events according to the content of Lamentations. Salters (2010:28) also identifies this concept as one of the edifying messages of the book.

3.4.8.6 Hope

God did not need hope, but Judah needed it to survive the exilic conditions. Gottwald (2009:311) and Japhet (2004:226) identify an expression of hope, which was intended to instil hope in the hearts of the mourners in the midst of the devastation. Dever (2006:626) says that this kind of hope is hoping in the God who seems to be afflicting his people. In Lamentations 3:21, 24, 26 and 31 there are expressions of hope in agony. Dorsey (1999:252) understands the

poet to have the purpose of giving 'hope and encouragement to the survivors of Jerusalem's fall.' The author further points out that restoration would be possible, because of God's attributes of being loving and compassionate.

3.4.8.7 Theological meaning

The book of Lamentations has theological significance in the history of Judah. The book as a whole, though it may not be said to have one central theme, has meaning for the entire theology of the Old Testament. Parry (2010:20) intimates, 'Lamentations is a book of honest theological and spiritual struggle.' Nichol ed. (1976c:544) says that the poems of the book are the ultimate fulfilment of the prophecies of Jeremiah about the subjugation of Judah by Babylonians. God had made appeals to his people to repent and thus avoid the coming disaster. He spoke to them especially through the prophet Jeremiah, who often had to endure physical assault and false prophets opposing his warnings. The appeals of the mourners were very late. When God says something will happen, He does not lie. Things actually happen as God foretold.

3.5 Summary

The book of Chronicles, which is about the words of the days known to the writer, indicates that Judah was carried away into Babylon. However, it is not a purely historical book, but a theological book written to address a situation of reconstituting the cultic services by one or some of the cultic servants. The book was written specifically for Levites in order to guide them in their duties in different services of the cult. The historical background of the reigns of David, Solomon and the subsequent monarchs of Judah are vehicles for the transmitting or expressing of theological concepts that the Jews of the time, the post-exilic era, needed. One of the major themes of the book is the reconstitution of the cultic services during the post-exilic period. The book of Chronicles itself does refer to other sources that contain more historical details, thus demonstrating that it is neither retelling history nor ignorant about history. Therefore, the book of Chronicles is not intended to be a historical source, since it contains omissions, alterations and additions to the earlier historical facts, which were at the writer's disposal. Finally, the book is about Jerusalem and not necessarily the whole Judaea.

The book of Ezra-Nehemiah, which is basically one book, deals with those events and experiences in the lives of the Jews that played a role in the reformation, restoration and reconstruction of the destroyed temple and city of Jerusalem. The book is a clear post-exilic literature that refers to the Persian regime, but says nothing about the Hellenistic regime. The book was certainly a compilation by Jews in Jerusalem who experienced either the support or opposition of the Persian kings and the remnant of Judah. The addressees of the book range from the Persian king, to Jews and to God. The book recognises the existence of the remnant in Judah, but the latter had to disassociate themselves from strange influences to be assimilated into the Judaism faith of the returnees.

As a genre, the book of Lamentations is clearly poetry. It was written during the exilic period expressing the grief of the time, primarily for the remnant Judeans. The book of Lamentations is not a historical book and it is concerned with the destroyed state of Jerusalem and not the whole Judaea. Except the city of Jerusalem, the book says nothing about the northern kingdom of Israel or the other parts of the province of Judah. What is interesting is that the writer does not regard himself or herself as any significant person, but rather concentrates on the fact that Judah was carried into exile to Babylon. Therefore, there must be some theological meaning in the emptiness or the exile of Judah.

3.6 Conclusion

The books of Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah and Lamentations were written by cultic servants or citizens of Jerusalem. Lamentations was written during the exile, and Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah after the exile. Yet, they share the sentiment that Judah was taken into captivity as if the land had been literally emptied of dwellers. Having said that it must be noted that Ezra-Nehemiah recognises the existence of the remnant in Judah. Lipschits (2005:112) succinctly points out that the emptiness of Judah was manifest especially in the royal and cultic life of Judah. Indeed, the Judean royal and cultic spheres were remarkably disrupted or actually ceased. God actively departed with the exiles and was active in Babylon using Daniel, Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego in a spectacular manner. In Jerusalem, God's glorious manifestations had ceased. Judah was figuratively emptied of God. All the substance or factors that had made

it unique were non-existent. The book of Ezra-Nehemiah deals with refilling the substance that Judah was emptied of in terms of human role players.

Chapter 4

Historical study of the concept of the emptiness of exilic and early Persian Judah

4.1 Introduction

The introductory study of Lamentations, Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah has indicated that the authors of those books primarily wrote for their community in Jerusalem and that they focused on Jerusalem. In this chapter, historical issues related to the exile of Judeans to Babylon will be investigated by consulting non-biblical sources to shed more light on historical events prior to the exile, during it and immediately thereafter. The objective in this regard is to understand the events related to the exile, especially Judah's relationships with surrounding nations from around the fall of Nineveh up to the emergence of Persia. The rise of the Persian Empire ended or reduced the exilic experience, thus paving a way for the restoration of Judah. From the onset, it has to be stated that prior to the exilic period the situation in the Levant was highly volatile due to the contest between super powers of the time. Inasmuch as Israelites had earlier wished to have a king like other nations, they were to learn to survive like other nations. As other nations formed pacts or alliances, the nation of Judah could not remain aloof and disengaged.

Good international relationships appeared to be imperative to the kings of the ancient Near East, including Judah despite having received prophetic expressions about their imminent subjugation. However, some Judean kings and people thought to circumvent the imminent exile by making a pact with Egypt for their apparent strength early in the Babylonian era. Betlyon (2005:5) succinctly states, 'Late seventh and early-sixth-century Egyptian and Babylonian diplomats jockeyed for influence over buffer states, including Judah.' The author continues to emphasise, 'They exerted tremendous influence on Jehoiakim.' To Coogan (2006:359), the kingdom of Judah was 'caught up in larger struggles, between a dying Assyria, a resurgent Egypt, and a rising Babylon....'

It appears that the division of the Israelite monarchy, the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel and the deportation of its citizens to other lands left the kingdom of Judah highly exposed to encroaching nations and therefore very insecure about its future. Not only was the nation of Judah vulnerable, but other nations needed countries as buffer zones or to enter into security or military alliance with other nations to increase their defensive prowess. Judah's involvement in untested diplomatic ties with other nations, even under Babylonian rule, rendered it more vulnerable than during the Assyrian hegemony, during which Judah managed to remain an independent kingdom by God's power.

The imminent fall of the Assyrian super power in 612 BCE was the point when the state of Judah began to engage anew in diplomatic ties. This action was triggered by the fact that Judah became subject to Egypt subsequent to the death of Josiah, who was killed in a battle against Egypt in 609 BCE. The fall of Assyria needs to be studied as to how it affected the stability and security of Judah.

4.2 Fall of Assyria

According to Finegan (1999:248; 252), the Assyrian domination of the Levant lasted from about 853 BCE (Battle of Qarqar) until 612 BCE (destruction of Nineveh by Nabopolassar and his supporters). Kaiser (1998:357) dates the Assyrian hegemony from 745 BCE to 612 BCE and calls it the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Rogerson and Davies (1989:153) indicate that Assyria began to challenge Judah in 740 BCE. Assyria wielded power over Judah from during King Hezekiah's reign, specifically from 701 BCE, when Assyria captured Lachish under the leadership of Sennacherib (Rogerson and Davies, 1989:153). The Assyrian super power certainly did not leave Judah unscathed. Its negative impact predisposed Judah to use alliance forming defence tactics against Assyria, the enemy of Judah that had been only held in abeyance by the power of God.

Isserlin (2001:89) explains that the alliances of Judah against Assyria was to no avail, as some cities of Judah were seized and Jerusalem had to pay high tribute to Assyria, even though it had not been seized. Scheffler (2001:121) dates the attempt to resist Assyria between 704 and 681 BCE during the reign of Hezekiah, son of Ahaz. Kaiser (1998:367) refers to the event as a Syrian-

Palestine revolt against Assyria. Hezekiah took part in it, but the Assyrians quickly managed to suppress it in 701 BCE. Herrmann (1981:264) explains that Egypt supported Assyria even before the fall of Nineveh around 616 BCE and again in 609 BCE. The author sums up, 'They attempted to defend the Assyrians against the Babylonians and their allies.' Even as Assyria was in the process of falling, Judah was in danger of either being betrayed or torn apart by its friends. The act of Judah of becoming part of confederacies instead of trusting in their invincible God (2 Chronicles 32:20-22) was a risky move.

Betlyon (2005:5) says, 'Assyrian's stronghold on the lands of Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent came to an abrupt end in 612 B.C.E when a coalition of Medes and Babylonians captured Nineveh.' Edersheim (1995:964) specifies the names of the Median and Babylonian kings involved in the seizure of Nineveh as Kyaxares of Media and Nabopolassar of Babylon. Assyria did not fall completely in a day, but its demise took place over some time. Herrmann (1981:265) indicates that Pharaoh Necho II went to support Assyria against Babylon in 609 BCE in order to re-establish the reign of Asshur-uballit. However, Egypt only managed to defeat Judah en route to support Assyria, but failed to assist Assyria to withstand the power of Babylon effectively. Eventually, in the same year, Assyria gave in to the might of Babylon and its allies.

In the battle of 609 BCE, Josiah was the King of Judah who had removed the gods of Assyria in places where they were kept in Israel and Judah, according to Herrmann (1981:266). The author continues to elucidate that Josiah wanted a reunion of Israel and Judah. In a way, Josiah wanted the complete fall of Assyria. Nevertheless, Herrmann (1981:271) explains why Josiah resisted Egypt thus: 'Whether Josiah knew of the Pharaoh's intentions or not, the appearance of Egyptian troops in Palestine must have displeased him. For, even if the Assyrians had been defeated, the presence of foreign troops on the borders of Israel and Judah was a danger that threatened the independence of the states of Syria and Palestine.'

It seems the gradual fall of Assyria and the defeat of Judah by Egypt marked the beginning of the irreversible fall of Judah. There are two possibilities. Either Egypt subjected Judah to its authority to use Judah against Babylon or Judah did not support Babylon openly in time so that

Babylon could prevent their rival Egypt to seize Judah. Finegan (1999:252) indicates that Necho II meant to help the Assyrians to thwart the Neo-Babylonians, while Josiah's objective was to hinder Egypt from helping Assyria, Judah's ancient rival. The positions of Necho and Josiah were not purely about taking or picking sides. Necho, on the one hand, wished Egypt to succeed Assyria and take control of Syria and Palestine, as will be made clear in the section on Egyptian opportunism (see 4.3.1 below). Josiah, on the other hand, wished to reconcile Israel and Judah, as stated before. By ensuring that no super power came into being, the freedom and equality of all states would promote his plans of reconciling Israel and Judah.

The New Bible Dictionary (1996: 99) describes the final fall of Assyria thus: 'For 2 years the government under Ashur-uballit held out at Harran, but no help came from Egypt, Neco marching too late to prevent the city falling to the Babylonians and Scythians in 609 BC. Assyria ceased to exist and her territory was taken over by the Babylonians.'

4.3 Babylon versus Egypt over Judah

Subsequent to the fall of Assyria, Babylon and Egypt were in a military and diplomatic battle to win control of Judah until Judah became virtually non-existent or of such minor significance that that it was no longer desired either as a buffer zone or for tributary reasons. Were it not for Egypt and Babylon's tussle for Judah, which lasted until 586 BCE, when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, the history of Judah might not have been as gruesome as it turned out to be, especially with regard to the deportations of people from Judah by Babylon. In fact, Judah suffered more than Egypt in the tussle between Babylon and Egypt (609-586 BCE), as Egypt was defeated only outside its borders. Egypt constantly withstood Babylonian attempts to penetrate its borders.

4.3.1 The opportunism of Egypt

Edersheim (1995:959) explains that the fall of Assyria revived the innate dreams of Egypt, the enemy of Assyria at that time. As a result, Pharaoh Necho decided to challenge Assyria. Destroying the weak Assyria would have been ideal, but the matter of dealing with the rising Babylon was a matter of urgent attention. Edersheim (1995:960) remarks on the possible

subjugation of Assyria, 'In that case the expedition of Necho would have been designated "King of Assyria" as successor to that power.'

Kaiser (1998:388) explains that after the fall of Nineveh in 611 BCE, Egypt did not have the same respect for Assyria as in the past. In truth, Egypt wanted Assyria to fall. However, the rise of Babylon as an imposing super power forced Egypt to side with Assyria against Babylon. In supporting Assyria against Babylon, Egypt wanted to halt the rise of Babylon and not to restore Assyrian supremacy as such. Herrmann (1981:264) outlines the main motives of Egypt for engaging in a battle to support Assyria, namely to try and recover some lost territory, to control Syria and Palestine in order to protect Egypt from Assyria and its opponents, and to have buffer zones for protection against super powers.

Kaiser (1998:388) says that the battle of 609 BCE was unsuccessful for Egypt and Assyria; however, on its way back, Egypt managed to besiege Kadesh and gain control of part of Syria and Palestine. Furthermore, in Judah, Pharaoh Necho II deposed and deported Jehoahaz, who had succeeded Josiah only three months earlier. The Pharaoh installed Eliakim and named him Jehoiakim (see 4.3.2 below). Henceforth, Judah paid tribute to Egypt.

The Pharaoh was not distressed that Assyria was defeated despite their help, for Egypt had gained Kadesh and Judah. In a way, Egypt was still in the contest for supremacy in Syria and Palestine. Probably, even if Judah had not resisted Egypt en route to support Assyria against Babylon, Egypt would eventually have attempted to subject Judah under its authority. This would have conformed to its aspiration to control the Judean territory, which had been under Assyrian sway, for security and tributary reasons. Hence, in his retreat, Pharaoh Necho imposed tributary obligations on Judah.

4.3.2 Josiah's family and Egypt

While Egypt had its own motives for its decisions in the light of the weakening Assyria, Josiah, King of Judah, also had motives for resisting his ally Necho II, who was on the offensive together with Assyria against Babylon. Edersheim (1995:960) emphasises that Egypt was positioned against Assyria. The author continues to indicate that Josiah's interest was to continue with his

plans to re-unite Israel and Judah. He expected to be appreciated by Assyria for resisting Egypt. The author (Edersheim 1995:960) says that impressing Assyria would help to keep the independence of Judah as a kingdom. Beek (1963:123) states, 'Josiah's politics were neutral, with a bias in favour of Babylon rather than Egypt.' Hence, Josiah attempted to thwart the Egyptian's offensive through Palestine to Babylon. It is said that Pharaoh Necho II advised Josiah to withdraw, but he refused, and thus Josiah was killed by the Egyptian troops near Megiddo, according to Beek (1963:123). To Isserlin (2001:90), Judah's King Josiah, ally of Pharaoh Necho II, blundered by refusing Necho II passage to Megiddo.

Edersheim (1995:961) expounds that the motives of Josiah came to naught with his death during the battle against Egypt waged at the plain of Megiddo. The author (1995:961) states, 'Henceforth Judah was alternately vassal to Egypt or Babylon.' Because of Josiah's death, Josiah's sons were subjected to either Egypt or Babylon. Edersheim (1995:961) names Josiah's sons as Johanan (who either died while Josiah reigned or during the battle as his father did), Eliakim (also named Jehoiakim by Pharaoh Necho II) (see 4.3.7.2 below), Shallum (also called Jehoahaz, first appointed as a successor of Josiah) (see 4.3.7.1 below) and Zedekiah (the last king of Judah) (see 4.3.7.4 below). Each of the sons of Josiah that succeeded to the throne was appointed according to his loyalty to either Egypt or Babylon. Herrmann (1981:274) explains that Jehoahaz, who first succeeded Josiah, was not the eldest son and therefore not rightfully entitled to the throne, but he was preferred by Babylon for his anti-Assyrian inclinations. The rightful successor Eliakim was not anti-Assyrian in outlook. Edersheim (1995:961) indicates that Jehoahaz was also anti-Egyptian in his outlook, and thus the people of Judah favoured him, after Egypt had defeated Judah. Jehoahaz served as a vassal king, according to Isserlin (2001:90) and Coogan (2006:359). Herrmann (1981:274) further indicates that Pharaoh Necho II deposed and deported Jehoahaz and replaced him with his older brother Eliakim, whose name he changed to Jehoiakim. Egypt had dominion over Judah because they had killed Josiah and conquered the Benjamin area (Guillaume 2005:86). Edersheim (1995:962) expounds on the Egyptian entourage that was victorious over Judah, although they were defeated by Babylon. The Egyptians arrested Jehoahaz and enthroned the rightful successor, Eliakim, who was 25

years old. The change of Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim was meant to magnify Egyptian authority over Judah.

4.3.3 Babylonian power over Egypt

The fact that Judah was a vassal state under the power of Egypt entailed that defeat of Egypt would also mean defeat of Judah. Because Egypt was still a force that could resist Babylon more than any other nation in Syro-Palestine, total independence of Egypt together with its influence even outside its borders was a clear threat to rising Babylon.

Noth (1959:279) summarises the position of Egypt thus: 'Egyptian rule did not last long. After the fall of Assyria the victorious Medes and Babylonians ... shared the Assyrian booty.' According to Isserlin (2001:89), the fall of Assyria was precipitated by an internal contest for the position of king after the death of Ashurbanipal. Noth (1959:280) continues, '... Egyptian Pharaoh Necho, was slain by the "king" Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in the fourth year of the Judean king Jehoiakim ... in 605 BCE.' The author explains that the Babylonian monarch usurped the Egyptian ruled land from the Euphrates River and that '... the State of Judah had to recognise the sovereignty of Nebuchadnezzar.' Bruce (1997:81) elaborates that following the defeat of Egypt by Babylon and Media, '... the king of Babylon had taken all his territory from the Wadi of Egypt to the Euphrates River. Assyria had disappeared for ever; the Babylonian Empire now covered all the southern area of the former Assyrian Empire while the Median Empire took over its northern provinces.' Miller and Hayes (1986:426) explain that Babylon was the greatest power compared to Assyria, Egypt, Media and Lydia; however, it was not able to wield power in the Near East like the Assyrians and the Persians had. The author continues to point out the limiting factor as the Medes, who assisted Babylon to conquer Assyria by ruling 'the highlands north and east of Mesopotamian plain. Most of the Fertile Crescent was in Babylonian hands, but the Medes largely controlled the eastern trade routes, forcing the Babylonians to turn their economic interests more to the west.' Moreover, the authors (1986:427) indicate that the might of the Median power gave some Jews the impression that the Medes might oust the Babylonians from power. Such hopes were dashed by the Babylonian victory at Carchemish in 605 BCE.

4.3.4 The victory at Carchemish

The battle at Carchemish might have been waged over Assyrian territory in Palestine and Syria. Egypt was not being attacked. Egypt engaged in the battle for some motives. Coogan (2006:359) gives an indication that, in a way, Assyria and Egypt were united against Babylon, because the Assyrians are said to have also been defeated in the same battle. The author goes on to say that after the victory of the Babylonians, they advanced against Egypt in order to restrict it within its borders and totally thrust it out of Palestine and Syria. However, Guillaume (2005:86) asserts that after being defeated, Egypt managed to resist 'Babylonian invasions of its heartland until the Persian period.' Bruce (1997:79) states, 'So after one single battle all those states passed from the Egyptian into the Babylonian sphere of influence.' Bruce (1997:79) further indicates that the Judean king of the time, Jehoiakim, 'formally submitted to him.' Edersheim (1995:965) emphasises that the Egyptian army was severely beaten and all former Assyrian colonies were taken by Babylon. Kaiser (1998:388) elaborates that at Carchemish in 605 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt, but he was called back to Babylon because his father had died.

The Carchemish battle had an impact on Judah, which was subjected to Babylon after the battle. Kaiser (1998:401) intimates, 'Liberation from Egyptian bondage came in 605 BCE when Nebuchadnezzar drove the Egyptians out of Palestine, but little changed for Judah. Extradition from one form of slavery only meant its replacement with another form of slavery under Babylon.' Isserlin (2001:90-91) sums it up saying, 'Syria and Palestine now fell, and Judah also submitted to Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BCE).' The author goes on to explain that the power of Egypt was not totally finished, because Egypt could defend its borders even against Babylon, thus giving Judah false hope that Babylon could be overthrown or resisted by an alliance with Egypt. In the next section, the defensibility of Egypt will be evaluated.

4.3.5 Egyptian resistance

Pfeiffer (1962:13) posits his opinion of Egypt's strength as follows: 'The smaller states of Syria and Palestine were easy prey for Nebuchadnezzar. His real foe and potential rival was Egypt.'

The author continues to say that in Nebuchadnezzar's fourth year, Babylon fought against Egypt and there was no clear victor. Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon after being 'weakened' by Egypt. Furthermore, Pfeiffer (1962:13) concludes that at that time, Babylon was the attacking nation and Egypt was defending itself, so the Babylonian troops were defeated. Whether Babylon used the armies added with those of vassal states under its sway or not, Egypt managed to withstand Babylonian attack against all odds.

Egypt was not content with security within its borders, but needed a buffer zone to protect it from the dominant power of the time. Guillaume (2005:89) posits, 'After 601, Egypt fomented revolts among the Palestinian rulers in order to weaken Babylonian pressure on its northern border.' Guillaume (2005:87) indicates that Babylon and Egypt contested the Philistine country and Nebuchadnezzar managed to conquer Ashkelon; however, Egypt reclaimed Gaza under Necho in 601 BCE, and at the same time prevented Babylon from entering Egyptian territory. Guillaume (2005:87) says that this loss meant that Babylon had to give up attempts to seize Egypt. Herrmann (1981:277) sums up, 'The king of Akkad and his host turned and went back to Babylon.'

It is clear that Egypt at home was stronger than Babylon. The Egyptian strength could cause subjugated nations to look at it for deliverance from tributary burdens. The condition of Palestine was disadvantaged by the strength of Egypt because, according to Guillaume (2005:92), 'Once they saw that they could not conquer Egypt, the Babylonians did not invest in Palestine, but left the area desolate so that it could not be used against them.'

The Egyptian resistance was instrumental in steering the history of Judah to an indeterminate state, at least as long as the exilic period lasted. In a way, the dominance of Babylon over Palestine could not benefit Babylon to the fullest, since they decided not to invest in it. On the other hand, Egypt created false hopes and led the other states like Judah to take risky decisions in order to free themselves from the yoke of Babylon. The Empire of Babylon had its limitations that were manifested in less comfort or rest in its territories, in Palestine and Syria, especially because of Egypt's effective resistance.

4.3.6 Egyptian influence over Judah

Judah lost independence to Egypt when Josiah died in trying to prevent Egyptian troops from passing through its land to assist Assyria against Babylon. When Babylon defeated Egypt in 605 BCE, it also seized Judah. Guillaume (2005:86) claims, 'After Josiah's execution, Necho nominated Jehoahaz, only to replace him with Jehoiakim three months later.' Of course, this statement raises questions as to who actually appointed Jehoahaz (see 4.3.7.1 below), but what is interesting is that the author further says that Jehoahaz was taken to Egypt 'and was used to manipulate Jerusalem against Babylon.' Guillaume (2005:89-90) accentuates the fact that Egypt attempted to influence Judah against Babylon by making such a statement, even though Babylon appointed Zedekiah as vassal king when they arrested and deported Jehoiachin; nevertheless, Egypt was still able to influence Judah against Babylon despite the appointment of Zedekiah. (See 4.3.7.1; 4.3.7.2; 4.3.7.4 below) for more detailed discussions of these kings of Judah.)

Judah was not fully free from the influence of Egypt. Being not free would only be to Judah's own detriment and not that of Egypt, because Babylon ceased to attempt invading Egypt in 601 BCE due to Egyptian effective resistance. With the indirect provocations of Egypt or tactics to keep Babylon busy in re-subjecting recalcitrant states, Babylon could not fully focus on planning to attack Egypt (see 4.3.5 above). Unfortunately, the Egyptian influence led to the demise of Judah. The influence of Egypt on each of the last kings of Judah after Josiah will be studied in the next section.

4.3.7 The last kings of Judah

The last kings of Judah were sons and a grandchild of Josiah. A fact worth mentioning is that the volatility of the situation during the rise of Babylon and the resistance of Egypt against Babylon caused great losses for the family of Josiah. With the exception of Johanan (who either died while Josiah reigned or during the battle as his father did), all the sons of Josiah, namely, Eliakim (named Jehoiakim by the Egyptians), Jehoahaz and Mattaniah (also called Zedekiah), as

well as his grandson, Jehoiachin, had a stint on the throne. Sadly, they were all either killed in war or deported; thus, the legitimate Davidic dynasty was ended in Judah.

4.3.7.1 Jehoahaz

According to the New Bible Dictionary (1996:545), Jeremiah identifies Jehoahaz as Shallum and that probably means that his royal name was Jehoahaz. He was the third son of Josiah, whose eldest brother, Johanan, was dead and the second eldest brother, Eliakim, was still alive, but not sufficiently popular with the people of Jerusalem at that time to be appointed as king. Pfeiffer (1962:19) says that the people of Judah appointed Jehoahaz. However, Guillaume (2005: 86) claims that Jehoahaz was nominated by the Egyptian Pharaoh, Necho, shortly after the death of King Josiah in 609 BCE. Perhaps his appointment as a vassal king was not imposed by the victorious Egyptian King, but some diplomacy was exercised in the process. He ruled for only three months, because the Egyptians deposed him when they came back from a war. He was replaced by the rightful heir to the throne, Eliakim, the second son of Josiah.

4.3.7.2 Jehoiakim

Jehoiakim's pre-throne name was Eliakim and Pharaoh Necho appointed him after he had deposed and deported Jehoahaz. Necho gave him the name, Jehoiakim, as his throne name. Earlier, Necho had defeated Judah and killed Josiah, King of Judah. It is not clear as to how Egypt knew that Eliakim was pro-Egypt. Edersheim (1995:263) reports that the king ruled for eleven years, during which idolatry increased. The writer continues to explain his reign as one '... characterised by public wrong, violence, oppression and covetousness. While the land was impoverished, the king indulged in luxury, and built magnificent palaces, or adorned towns, by the means of forced labour, which remained unpaid, and at the cost of the lives of a miserable enslaved people.' Kaiser (1998:400) indicates that King Jehoiakim placed a heavy tax burden upon Judah. The king was severely criticised for building a new palace while Judah had to bear such a heavy tax burden. Furthermore, the author (1998:401) presents the king as the one who actually cut Jeremiah's scroll into pieces and threw them into the fire. Beek (1963:124) indicates that the fact that Jehoiakim was appointed by Egypt as king of Judah caused the

Babylonians to be harsh on Judah. Herrmann (1981:277) explains that from 604 BCE, Jehoiakim was subjected to Babylon for about three years.

When Egypt resisted Babylon successfully in the fourth year of Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiakim sided with Egypt again and ceased to pay tribute to Babylon, according to Pfeiffer (1962:13). The author continues to indicate that while Babylonian troops were recuperating, the pro-Egyptian group continued to consolidate themselves. Noth (1959:281) and Anstey (1973:223) report that because of this rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar sent his army from the neighbouring nations such as Edom, Moab and Ammon to attack Judah in 602 BCE. Noth (1959:281) further says that either Jehoiakim survived the attack or he resorted to a submissive attitude for another three years. Bruce (1997:79-80) reports that Jehoiakim tried to extend his borders by attacking weaker neighbouring nations that fought and defeated him and handed him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar favoured him thinking that he had been fighting against Egypt and their supporters.

Guillaume (2005:89) says that in view of the wondrous defeat of the army of Sennacherib in 701 BCE in favour of Judah and the support of Egypt, as well as the belief that Zion could not be defeated, Jehoiakim was predisposed to rebel against Babylon contrary to the advice of Jeremiah. In addition to the factors mentioned above, Bruce (1997:79-80) mentions the fact that the defeat of Babylon by Egypt in 601 BCE was so severe that it took Babylonian troops about eighteen months to recover. Moreover, some nations withheld their tributes, including Jehoiakim. Kaiser (1998:402) says that because of the rebellion of Jehoiakim, Babylon together with the Aramean, Moabite and Ammonite armies attacked Jerusalem in 597 BCE. Jehoiakim died during the battle, according to Coogan (2006:359) and Kaiser (1998:402). Coogan (2006:359) says that Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, was appointed by the people of Judah during the battle to succeed his father as king, as they had done earlier in the case of Jehoahaz, who had only reigned for three months.

It is clear that the people of Judah were very indiscreet by appointing a king while the battle was fought. Moreover, they were unable to learn that the person appointed while the nation was being assailed was at the same risk as Jehoahaz had been. However, the other factor could

be that they needed a successor who upheld the policies of the deceased king, especially the policy of resisting Babylon against prophetic counsel. It is also clear that at such a time, a king was the heart or engine of a nation and had to serve by making decisions on diplomatic ties with other nations. The question is how Jehoiachin coped with the responsibilities of a king.

4.3.7.3 *Jehoiachin*

Jehoiachin was the son of Jehoiakim. The rebellion that was the cause of the Babylonians' attack on Judah had been undertaken by Jehoiakim – the father of King Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin reigned for three months just as Jehoahaz had. Kaiser (1998:402) elaborates that Jehoiachin was appointed as king in December 598 BCE and ruled until around March 597 BCE. Sacchi (2000:47) indicates that since Jehoiachin's father, Jehoiakim, rebelled and died during the course of the war in 598 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar arrested Jehoiachin only without punishing him, as Jehoiachin's father had been responsible for the rebellion and not his son. Kaiser (1998:402) provides details saying, 'Jehoiachin, the queen mother, the princes and ten thousand leading citizens, smiths and craftsmen were taken along with servants and booty into captivity to Babylon.' The comment of Edersheim (1995:967) illustrates the devastation of Nebuchadnezzar's actions, when he points out, 'All the treasures of the temple and the palace were carried away, the heavier furnishings of the sanctuary being cut in pieces.' Furthermore, the author mentions that all the men that could fight in war or plan for battle were taken to Babylon in order to curtail any possibility of a war. The writer (1995:967) breaks down the number of captives thus:

'Their number is roughly stated as 11 000 ... comprising 3 000 ranked as "princes" and leading citizens, 7000 soldiers (10 000, 2 Kings 24:14) and 1000 craftsmen especially smiths Considering that the total population of Jerusalem at the time – including women and children – is only calculated at between 50 000 and 60 000 souls, only a sparse remnant can have left behind – and that wholly composed of "the poorest sort of the people of the land." Among the captives was the prophet Ezekiel....'

Jehoiachin's life history does not indicate that he was restored to his position as king in Judah, but he was elevated to a position in Babylon higher than that of other Kings that were arrested

like him. Isserlin (2001:91) indicates that in Jehoiachin's stead Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, also a son of Josiah, was appointed as a vassal king of Judah by Babylon. He was given the name, Zedekiah, by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon.

4.3.7.4 Zedekiah

At that time, Babylon was entitled to tribute from Judah. Babylon therefore appointed a vassal king that had to manage its affairs in Judah. The king was appointed in consideration of the Judean royal lineage and policy of the royal contender. Herrmann (1981:280) indicates that Zedekiah succeeded his nephew, Jehoiachin, and Sacchi (2000:47) explains that Jehoiachin did not yet have a son to succeed him, since he was only 18 years old. The pre-throne name of the king was Mattaniah, but he was given the name Zedekiah by Nebuchadnezzar (Pfeiffer, 1962:14). Herrmann (1981:280) posits, 'Zedekiah was originally appointed as a man after Nebuchadnezzar's heart, but he did not prove to have this character.'

The influence of Egypt still hovered over Judeans, and the Judeans themselves were not ideologically diluted and policed. Unfortunately, the king was not equipped with a military service or personnel to help him to enforce paying homage to Babylon and to quench any resistance against Babylonian superiority in his government. Zedekiah was expected to use only his royal influence and authority to keep Judah subject to Babylon. This approach to subjugation was very weak, as will be explained in the following discussion.

Edersheim (1995:970) points out that Zedekiah reigned for eleven years and did evil things during his reign. Eventually, he rebelled against Babylon. Kaiser (1998:402) highlights that Zedekiah ruled from 597 BCE to the very fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. The author hastens to point out that since Jehoiachin was still regarded as king of Judah, even in exile, Zedekiah was just a regent ruler. During his regime, he was exposed to Egyptian promises just as Jehoiakim had been. Pfeiffer (1962:22) comments, 'Egypt was constantly offering aid to encourage Judah to rebel against Babylon.' The writer concludes that Babylonians were not wise to deport useful Judeans to Babylon leaving behind 'inexperienced' persons to serve with the king.

Zedekiah was faced by a divided group of people, and to lead them was extremely difficult. The majority were pro-Egyptian, although some were pro-Babylonian, according to Isserlin (2001:91). The author continues to mention that in 594/3 BCE, there was an attempt to rebel against Babylon, but it did not materialise. Concerning this incidence, Edersheim (1995:968) posits, '... ambassadors from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon appeared at the court of Zedekiah – no doubt to deliberate about a combined movement against Babylonia....' Kaiser (1998:404) paints a picture that suggests that this first involvement in the rebellion of Zedekiah was the result of pressure that was exerted on him by government members that were anti-Babylonian and pro-Egyptian. Subsequently, Zedekiah vacillated and recanted personally or through a delegation. Beek (1963:127) says that Babylonian intelligence knew about the meeting and an explanation was asked from Zedekiah. Pfeiffer (1962:14) points out that the policy of 'non-interference' of Psalmmetichus II, the successor of Pharaoh Necho, rendered the attempt to rebel a failure, because Egypt would not throw its weight behind the rebellion. Edersheim (1995:968) simply says that the attempt to rebel did not materialise and that Zedekiah sent ambassadors to appease the Babylonians. He elaborates, 'The embassy to Babylon seems not to have appeased the suspicions of Nebuchadnezzar and Zedekiah had to appear personally in Babylon....' The aftermaths of the first attempt to rebel were not catastrophic, as reconciliation between Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar was successfully negotiated.

In 588 BCE, a new Pharaoh, Hophra, came into power in Egypt and he did not uphold the policy of non-interference, according to Sacchi (2000:47-48), who posits, 'All of Syria rose up against the Babylonians and Zedekiah followed the enthusiasm of the revolt.' Provan *et al.* (2003:280) and Betlyon (2005:5) agree that Zedekiah rebelled by not honouring his tributary requirements to Babylon. Consequently, '... Judah faced the full onslaught of Neo-Babylonian arms,' Betlyon (2005:5) says. This time, Zedekiah relied on the support of Egypt, Herrmann (1981:282) attests. However, Kaiser (1998:389) reports, 'But when Judah looked for help from Egypt, there was not much help there.' The author continues to explain that in 588 BCE, Egypt managed to disturb Babylon for a while in an attempted fight, but the Pharaoh of the time, Apries, could not match the power of Babylon and he '... was driven back to Egypt and the siege of Jerusalem was again

set in place.’ The war continued for three years, according to Herrmann (1981:282). This is probably based on 2 Kings 25:1-2, which reckons the duration of the siege from the ninth to the twelfth year of Zedekiah’s reign (See 4.4.1 below).

A battle that lasts three years would normally have horrible consequences. Edersheim (1995:970) indicates that when the Egyptian army left the battle against Babylon, Judah was left on its own and exposed, with hunger added to their misery. He continues to say that in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, on the ninth day of the fourth month, Babylon ‘...gained possession of the northern suburb’ Coogan (2006:364) points out that the city of Jerusalem was burnt because of Zedekiah’s rebellion. The Judean king was misled by neighbouring states (Coogan, 2006:360-361), some of whom like Moab, Ammon and Edom joined Nebuchadnezzar in destroying Jerusalem. Nevins (2006:15-16) postulates, ‘The judgement of Nebuchadnezzar was clearly to terminate the Judean monarchy and obliterate Zedekiah’s government.’ Edersheim (1995:970) reports that Zedekiah and his troops attempted to flee to the south, but that they were pursued and arrested. ‘The soldiers dispersed in various directions,’ Edersheim remarks in his report, but the whole family of Zedekiah was captured, and though the king’s daughters were freed, his sons were executed in his full view. Finally, his eyes were taken out, making his final sight the murder of his sons. According to (Edersheim 1995:970) Zedekiah was taken to Babylon where he eventually died.

With Zedekiah’s deportation to Babylon, a second king of Judah was taken to Babylon because of a defeat of Judah. Earlier, in 598 BCE, Jehoiachin had been taken to Babylon. Unfortunately, it seemed to the Babylonians as if Zedekiah had been the cause of the rebellion. The citizens of Judah, more specifically of Jerusalem, with their inclination to Egyptian alliance, were the major instigators of the rebellion. A secondary cause is that the neighbouring nations were not honest with Judah. Apparently, Judah’s neighbouring nations manipulated Judah to provoke Babylon to destroy Judah and not them, even though they were all vassal states under Babylon. Judah was made to appear as the major rebellious nation against the rule of Babylon. Moreover, Judah was made to fight at the forefront, thus suffering heavy losses. As regards Egypt, as long as Babylon was engaged outside Egypt it could not plan other methods of defeating Egypt. Judah

was a loser in the diplomatic schemes of the time, because Judah was inexperienced in exploiting international relations for survival purposes.

4.4 The Fall of Jerusalem

4.4.1 Date

Anstey (1973:226-227) and Jensen (1978:222) agree that the fall of Jerusalem occurred in 586 BCE. The siege that culminated in the fall of Jerusalem prevailed for more than two and a half years, according to Finegan (1999:259). The New Bible Dictionary (1996:560) dates the seizure of Jerusalem to have occurred in 597 BCE and the destruction occurred in 587 BCE. The New Bible Dictionary(1996:1268) explains that the battle began in 588 BCE and was later on briefly suspended due to the intervention of Egyptian troops and it was continued again. Anstey (1973:114) says the fall of Jerusalem, which was hastened by a famine, occurred on the ninth day of the fourth month in the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign. Finegan (1999:259) says that the exact day of the fall of Jerusalem was the ninth day of the fourth month in 586 BCE. Finegan goes on to say that according to our calendar, the date would be 18 July 586 BCE. Therefore, if the siege began on 15 January 588 BCE and ended on 18 July 586 BCE, the actual duration of the siege was about two and a half years as Finegan (1999:259) indicates. Other details relating to the fall of Jerusalem will be considered in the following sections. (see 4.4.3 and 4.4.4 below).

4.4.2 The significance of Jerusalem

Jerusalem was the capital city of Judah and from its origins in the time of King David, it was never intended as an optional dwelling place for the citizens of Judah, but as a capital city to unite the north and the south. Berquist (2008:44) says that Jerusalem was not regarded to be in either Judah or Israel and as such, it could be called the city of David. It represented the courage of David since he seized it from the Jebusites. Turner (1973:25) posits, 'The importance of Jerusalem to the nation and the world was not to be measured so much in its buildings and in its walls but rather in its spiritual significance.' It is against this background that the following

statement is considered in this research: a country whose capital city is emptied of all authority by intruders is as good as empty.

Berquist (2008:47) guides Bible students to understand the significance of Jerusalem saying, 'Jerusalem seems not to be a space for living and residency, but a space for celebration, a place to visit for religious gatherings and a political spectacle.' Nevins (2006:15) substantiates, 'That Jerusalem went into exile does not mean the city was destroyed and completely emptied of inhabitants.' The author (2006:15) regards this expression as a biblical hyperbole. Furthermore, Nevins (2006:5) presents the records about the impact of the exile on Judah to be less carefully or technically constructed. He explains that the Babylonians would not burn the temple first and then loot it next, but that they would first plunder it and finally burn it, as opposed to the record of 2 Kings 25:8-17, which mentions the burning of the temple first.

Life would have been meaningless to Judah without any national identity that hinges on a specific government or leadership. Furthermore, the question would be whether there could be a Judah without Jerusalem (also notoriously and affectionately called Zion), either to Judeans or to Bible readers? The fact that Jerusalem was something to die for to many Judeans underpins its significance. Jerusalem was the centre of Judah and it held Judah together. Without Jerusalem, Judah would be scattered and insecure. Virtually everything (cult, royalty, economy, courts etc.) about Judah was based in Jerusalem. Without Jerusalem and all the leadership that was in Jerusalem, Judah was tantamount to insignificance.

4.4.3 Severity of the fall

Herrmann (1981:284) elaborates that after Zedekiah's rebellion, Nebuzaradan, the chief commander of Nebuchadnezzar's troops, was sent specifically to destroy the city of Jerusalem. The author (1981:284) posits:

'The city was extensively burnt; gaps were made in the walls, depriving Jerusalem of its fortifications. Above all, the temple vessels were taken to Babylon, along with some of its structure: the iron pillars, the stands and the so-called iron sea, a great bowl containing water for

purification. It is remarkable that the ark is not mentioned in this connection; we must assume that it too was either destroyed or taken away.'

Edersheim (1995:971) explains that the temple and the palace were set alight, the entire city was 'reduced to ruins and ashes and the city ramparts were broken down.' Herrmann (1981:285) further explains that the state was completely disintegrated, even though some residue of citizens were dispersed and in danger of forfeiting their uniqueness or identity. The author (1981:285) intimates, 'One cannot describe vividly enough the totality of the catastrophe which had befallen Judah with the fall of Jerusalem.' Fohrer (1973:308) attempts to balance the report of the tragedy by pointing out that the city wall was not totally destroyed and that the city still had residents; however, he concedes: '... of course their condition was wretched'

Judah was left in a demoralised state without any institution representing the identity of Judah. The capital city was not to serve as a centre of the state of Judah. Nothing was left of which Judah could pride itself.

4.4.4 Aggravating factors

Some of the factors that led to the gruesome fall of Jerusalem were internal and others were natural factors, which were not orchestrated, exploited or caused by the power of Babylon. These factors either caused Babylon to react harshly or advantaged Babylon during the siege. Miller and Hayes (1986: 417) indicate that in the territory of Benjamin, where extensive destruction was virtually not experienced due to the probable surrender of the Benjamin territory to Babylon. Judah was left in a demoralised state without any institution representing the identity of Judah.

The personality of Zedekiah was part of the problem. He was easily influenced or intimidated and a poor communicator, which made matters worse. Zedekiah lost the confidence of the Babylonians since he was unable to enforce Judah to pay tribute to Babylon. The major failure of Zedekiah was his inability to communicate with Babylonians about the volatility of the political atmosphere in Judah so that Babylon could put measures in place to curtail rumours of

rebellion and deter it from actually happening. Apparently, Babylon could not understand that Zedekiah was put under pressure by pro-Egypt Judeans. Zedekiah could have informed Babylon about the situation, but he opted to agree with pro-Egypt Judeans, probably because he had no security system to restrain rebellious tendencies in Judah.

Lipschits (2005:79) describes the defeat of Zedekiah when he and his supporters instigated a second rebellion against Babylon saying, 'This time they were merciless and treated Zedekiah as one who had violated his personal oath of fealty to Nebuchadnezzar.' Zedekiah, who was the last son of Josiah, was taken out of Judah and with all his sons murdered, it meant the end of the legitimate dynasty of David – to this end, Lipschits (2005:79) attests. The last king of Judah, King Zedekiah, died in Babylon.

In this process of harsh treatment unleashed against Judah, Nevins (2006:6) points out that the temple was partially destroyed by the Edomites. The Edomites became one of the external factors that made matters worse. The writer (2006:7) goes on to elaborate that it might have been the Edomites who burnt the temple after the Babylonians had left or even while the Babylonians were still in Jerusalem. Perhaps they could have received directives from Babylon to burn down the temple. Bruce (1997:84) says that the Edomites took for themselves the southern part of Judah, which was better known as the Negev. The author (1977:84) postulates, 'Possibly the Chaldeans officially gave the Negev to Edom.' Babylon was not the only oppressor and destroyer of Judah. Edom in particular was working for the extermination of Judeans for purposes of gaining more land. Edom perhaps positioned itself as a trustworthy ally of Babylon with the motive of increasing its territory by taking part of the land of Judah.

Betlyon (2005:6) describes the long siege of Jerusalem, which lasted more than two years before 586 BCE, and states, 'Sites were abandoned because of war, disease, drought and starvation.' Unfortunately, nature did not favour Judah at all. The drought at the time of the siege could be seen as an ordeal brought on Judah by God, who had instructed the Judeans through prophets like Jeremiah to submit to Babylon. In a way, Zedekiah's rebellion under the influence of some Judeans was also rebellion against God and drought was the response of

God. There was no way Judah could survive the aggravating circumstances that they brought upon themselves by their rebellion.

4.4.5 Cultic and political condition of Jerusalem

The systematic destruction carried out by Nebuzaradan was not meant to be a sheer demolition, destruction and punishment, but it was of political and cultic significance intended to incapacitate Judah such that there would be no possibility of a rebellion ever again. Lipschits (2005:112) portrays the destruction saying, 'The city was laid waste in a systematic and calculating manner designed to eradicate it as a political and religious center and it remained desolate and abandoned.' Commenting about the actual impact of the fall of Jerusalem, Bright (1972:343) says that the royal and temple institutions were hard hit and '... they would never be re-created in precisely the same form again.' Nevins (2006:16) argues, '... both text and tell when properly excavated agree that the destruction and deportations rendered a different reality in the land, one that was without monarchy and without Temple.'

The pride of the nation of Judah was the Jerusalem temple built by Solomon. The destruction of the temple was a cruel blow to Judah, because it was the place of their God, who was mightier than their kings. Edersheim (1995:971) specifies the dates on which the destruction was completed as the ninth and tenth of Ab in 586 BCE, which were to be commemorated, and posits the following: 'All of any value in the Temple that could be removed, either whole or broken up, was taken to Babylon ... the general population of Jerusalem and of Judah were carried into captivity. Only the poorest in the land were left to be husbandmen and vine-dressers' The writer continues to tell that Seraiah, the high priest, and Zephaniah, the second priest and '...three keepers of the door-chiefs of the Levites who kept watch at the three Temple gates were ... executed.' Noth (1959:286) says that the Ark might have been burnt and destroyed after Zedekiah's rebellion. The ultimate historical object of power, the Ark, had disappeared with all the significant things that it contained. Some cultic servants were exiled while others were executed. This blow put an end to normal and legitimate cultic services in Jerusalem. Miller and Hayes (1986:416) say that the repression of Judah's revolts and the

demolition of the city of Jerusalem were 'severe cultural and theological shocks for Judean society.'

All that made Judah to stand out among other nations was to no effect and the power that had withstood the Assyrians was withheld by God in disapproval of various atrocities and idolatry. The entire existence of Judah had previously been in the hands of God—in political, economic and cultic spheres. When God forsook Judah, everything fell apart to the dismay of all Judeans. According to 2 Chronicles 36:15-17, God sent messengers to Judah, but they were disregarded and mocked. Ultimately, God's anger was kindled against them and God decided to hand them over to Babylon, for there was no more remedy for them.

4.4.6 The situation of the population

The population affected severely by the fall was the population of Jerusalem, the heart of Judah. Bright (1972:344) intimates the following: 'Nebuchadnezzar's army left Judah a shambles ... The population of the land was drained away. Aside from those deported to Babylon, thousands must have died in battle or of starvation and disease ... some had been executed, while others ... fled for their lives.' Lipschits (2005:59) indicates that the population of the entire kingdom of Judah was about 110 000 and only 10 000 had been exiled with Jehoiachin. The Bible, in 2 Kings 25:11, 12, indicates that Nebuzaradan took the rest of the people who were in Jerusalem, excluding some poor persons left for vineyard work. The words of Jeremiah 24:10 allude to the fact that from the time of the exile of Jehoiachin, God warned that He would plague Zedekiah and the remnant with famine. Lipschits (2005:60) goes on to consider the quality of the people left in the land and cannot help but find justification for the analogy of good figs and bad figs expressed in Jeremiah 24.

The notion of a total deportation is given attention by Bright (1972:343-344), who regards it to be wrong if it means that the land was left 'empty and void,' however, admits, '...the catastrophe was nevertheless appalling and one which signalled the disruption of Jewish life in Palestine.' Kaiser (1998:405) bluntly says, 'The Babylonians deported the rest of the people left in the city along with the deserters who had gone over to the king of Babylon.' However, the

writer explains that the deportation did not result in resettlement of foreigners in the land of Judah and Jerusalem. Different scholars present the condition of Jerusalem in different terms. To Edersheim (1995:973), ‘... the last remnants of Judah had gone from the land. The Davidic rule had passed away, so far as merely earthly power was concerned ... But overall the city would be desolateness and the stillness. Yet was it stillness unto God’ Turner (1973:230 says, ‘... the “ghost city” welcomed returnees from Babylon.’ To Berquist (2008:41), the city of Jerusalem was remarkably depopulated. Isserlin (2001:91) estimates, ‘Most of the population – two-thirds perhaps – had perished in the war or were carried off into exile in Babylon’

It is generally accepted that the population of Jerusalem in particular was not left the same by the attacks of Babylon that were caused by the rebellion of the last few vassal kings of Judah. Total depopulation never happened, but the poor population that remained was left completely incapacitated to restore Judah to its reputation without the help of the deported population.

4.5 Exilic Judah

After the destruction of Jerusalem and the complete deportation or the execution and flight of the elite of Judah, the time of the exile truly came into effect. It was clear that Judah could not be the same again as long as Babylon’s sway prevailed.

4.5.1 Judah’s final recognition

Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the massive deportation of the elite, Judah was a vassal state under the auspices of the Babylonian hegemony. However, Bruce (1997:86) points out, ‘After he had punished Judah for its rebellion Nebuchadnezzar reduced its size and made it a province of his empire.’ At that time, the Edomites occupied the southern part of Judah. Perhaps the Babylonian king reasoned that reducing Judah would help to manage it. However, Herrmann (1981:291) argues, ‘There is no express mention anywhere that Judah was made a regular Babylonian province.’ The author proceeds to say that even Gedaliah was not appointed as a provincial governor. Miller and Hayes (1986:422) disagreeing that Judah became a province

and basing their opinion on a particular seal found in the Mizpah area postulate, '... Gedaliah was king over a Judean kingdom centered at Mizpah, following the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.'

Bruce (1997:86) concurs with Noth (1959:286) that it was after Zedekiah's rebellion that Judah became a province and explicates his convictions as follows:

'Nebuchadnezzar now made an end of Judaeen autonomy... But Nebuchadnezzar now did what he had failed to do in the year 598 BCE, he incorporated Judah in the provincial organization of the Neo-Babylonian Empire and eliminated the Davidian monarchy which had ruled in Jerusalem for about four centuries.'

The new province or governance structure was to be based in Mizpah, and Gedaliah was to be the leader of this new governance establishment. Nevins (2006:19) says that Mizpah could have been chosen due to its peacefulness after the destruction of Jerusalem. The author (2006:19) maintains, 'But even if Gedaliah's decision was based in part on a devastated Jerusalem, it does not mean the devastation was total and it does not mean the Temple was already destroyed.'

Judah was not a normal vassal state operating with a legitimate king according to their laws of succession even though paying tribute to Babylon. Babylon stayed involved by appointing a leader of its own choice to curtail rebellion because of Judah's rebellious response to Babylonian supremacy.

4.5.1.1 Appointment of Gedaliah

The Davidic dynasty was destroyed after the rebellion of Zedekiah. Gedaliah was the first governor or leader of the province of Judah, according to Noth (1959:287). The author carries on to say Gedaliah was a son of a high official from the time of Josiah as king. Guillaume (2005:91) describes Gedaliah as a man of royal lineage, but not be regarded as king. The author goes on to explain that Gedaliah came from the family of Shaphan, who had been instrumental in saving the prophet Jeremiah from harm during the siege of Jerusalem. Bruce (1997:86) cites the fact that Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah knowing that he did not agree to the alliance with Egypt against Babylon. Nevins (2006:18) speculates that Gedaliah could have been exiled with Jehoiachin and brought back to Jerusalem around the time of the destruction of the city.

Whatever the perceptions or speculations about Gedaliah, he was truly supportive of the Babylonian king. It is recorded in 2 Kings 25:24 that he entreated the remnant of Judah to settle in the land of Judah and serve the king of Babylon.

Pfeiffer (1962:17) portrays the people that were under Gedaliah's as the poor people of Judah. Edersheim (1995:972) depicts the people under Gedaliah's regime thus: 'Thither all that was left of Judah's representative men gathered, as also the wives, daughters, and children of the slain and the captives.' The writer mentions the fact that some refugees who had fled to other lands or countries also joined them. Bruce (1997:86) says that some Jews viewed Gedaliah and his followers as 'traitors.' The people that Gedaliah was to lead were not all constructive in nature. The mourning children and wives of some slain Judeans and some who had fled elsewhere could pose a threat to Gedaliah's leadership. Furthermore, it seems some Judeans were bent on resisting Babylon at all costs, even against the counsel of God's prophets like Jeremiah. The rebellious situation worked against Babylonian attempts to establish a governance system. Sanity had been long lost or the plaque intended by God to smite the unfaithful Judeans had to be fulfilled!

Gedaliah made a few leadership strides for a little while. Isserlin (2001:91-92) makes clear the fact that he led the remnant to focus on agriculture and allowed some of them to use the land vacated by the exiles, even though he was hated for such an act. Beek (1963:130) elucidates that because of his leadership, Judah was in the process of economic recovery. The author goes on to point out that the successful leadership of Gedaliah displeased the neighbouring states of the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites. Such a feeling among the neighbouring states indicated that diplomatic engagements were not ended with the victory of Babylon over the land of the Hittites.

4.5.1.2 Assassination of Gedaliah

It is generally agreed that a man known as Ishmael spearheaded the assassination of Gedaliah. Bruce (1997:86) and Pfeiffer (1962:17) point out that he was of the royal lineage of Judah and that he had sought refuge in Ammon. The factors that led to the animosity that developed and eventually led to Gedaliah's assassination are different according to various authors.

Kaiser (1998:406) states that with governance established in Mizpah under the leadership of Gedaliah, some persons from Judah who had fled to Moab, Ammon and Edom returned to Judah and went to Mizpah. There Gedaliah discharged his leadership role with due loyalty to Babylon, which was not appreciated by some people of Judah. Miller and Hayes (1986:424) conclude that the Ammonite King Baalis influenced Ishmael to murder Gedaliah and his group. The writers go on to say the purpose of the assassination was to re-establish the Davidic dynasty with the aid of the Ammonites. Pfeiffer (1962:17) says that Ishmael was working in cooperation with the Ammonite king. Earlier, the trust in Egyptian help had only led to the destruction of Jerusalem; this time, some Judeans who had fled there seemingly roped in the Ammonites. However, an element of Ammonite manipulation could be discerned in the situation. It is probable that the Ammonites did not want Judah to be recognised as an entity, but that they wanted it to be completely annihilated, probably with a view to some territorial expansion ambitions of their own.

As enshrined in Isaiah 30:1-3, God warned against trusting in alliances and the multitudes of horses and armies, while He was neglected or not consulted. Indeed the Jews did as other kings or nations did and not as God wanted them to do. To Bruce (1997:86), some Jews viewed Gedaliah and his followers as “traitors.” It is clear that the negative perception of Gedaliah’s cooperation with the Babylonians stemmed from the Jews. Jeremiah 44:11 indicates that God was determined to bring disaster to all Judah, even on those who opted to flee to Egypt. The God of heaven decided that disaster would be the result of idolatry and no one would thwart it by might or organisation.

Eventually, under the leadership of Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, a group of conspirators from Ammon managed to assassinate Gedaliah and some people that were with him. Guillaume (2005:92) portrays the assassination of Gedaliah saying, ‘An Arab clan murdered Gedaliah in the seventh month....’ The writer dates the act around 582 BCE. Beek (1963:131) explains that after the murder of Gedaliah and his courtiers, Ishmael met some pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. Nevins (2006:8) identifies these pilgrims as mourners from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria. Beek (1963:131) reports that they were killed, save ten of them who promised to provide Ishmael

with wheat, barley, oil and honey. These ten people survived to tell the story. Pfeiffer (1962:17) points out that some people, including Jeremiah, who were not killed in Mizpah, were forced to escape to Egypt with the conspirators. Some Jews fled to Egypt out of fear that Nebuchadnezzar would hold them accountable for the death of Gedaliah, according to Beek (1963:131-132). In commenting about the flight to Egypt, Herrmann (1981:292) posits, 'In this way the land will have suffered a creeping depopulation.' According to Beek (1963:131), Ishmael managed to return to Ammon.

Pfeiffer (1962:17) postulates the following possibility: 'Mention is made of a further deportation of Judaeans in 582 BCE (Jer 52:30). This may have been brought on by the disorders which followed the murder of Gedaliah.' Ishmael attempted to reduce the population of Judah further by trying to take some citizens of Judah with him after murdering Gedaliah. Pfeiffer (1962:17) poignantly states, 'With the death of Gedaliah and the dispersion of the surviving Judaeans, corporate Israelite life in Palestine came to an end.' Kaiser (1998:409) adds the following: 'Life in what was left of Judah and in Babylon was at a low ebb, socially, politically and religiously. All hope for any future seemed to have been evacuated.' This time, without the involvement of Babylon, the population of Judah was negatively affected or reduced again, and no person capable of leadership was left alive. In fact, some innocent persons who had come to mourn in Jerusalem met a tragic fate at the hands of conspirators led by Ishmael. The flight to Egypt could have been informed by the fact that Egypt could resist Babylon and hinder it from penetrating Egyptian borders; thus, they could have regarded Egypt as a good place of refuge.

Some scholars have various perceptions as to what became of Judah after the death of Gedaliah. Noth (1959:288) says, 'Tiny Judah was probably not established at all as an independent province; it was probably incorporated in the neighbouring province of Samaria, so that the Judaeans at its head was only a subordinate of the governor of Samaria, a deputy-governor with limited rights' Sacchi (2000:57) argues in view of Jehoiachin being regarded as king of Judah, even while he was in exile, that Judah was never a district of the Samaria province. The author (2000:57) postulates, 'Judaea had remained in some way an autonomous province, and in any case a well-defined unit within the Babylonian empire.' Davies (2007:155)

claims that Mizpah remained the capital city of Judah until the Persian era. However, Pfeiffer (1962:17) says that the territory of Judah was included in the territory of Samaria, which was organised as a province of Babylon.

The fact remains that the last attempt of Babylon to recognise and organise Judah into anything like a province was their effort to establish some governance in Mizpah after the destruction of Jerusalem. Politically, Judah seemed to have refused to be organised under the sway of Babylon up to the bitter end, rather making avail of the aid of foreign forces like Egypt and Ammon. The question is if there had been any organisation, as Sacchi (2000:57) and Davies (2007:155) say, why is history so quiet about it? According to 2 Kings 25:27-30, Jehoiachin was released from prison by the king of Babylon, Evil-Merodach, and elevated to a highly ranked political position in the Babylonian palace, but Jehoiachin was never restored to his throne in Judah. After the assassination of Gedaliah, the nation of Judah was politically reduced to less than a state. Thus, figuratively, Judah was empty or desolate. The reasonable perception of the state of Judah after Gedaliah's leadership is that the Judah territory was left in limbo.

4.5.2 Actual deportations and emigrations

Some Judeans left Judah under duress, while others left voluntarily, since the power of Egypt over Judah was replaced by that of Babylon. All those who relocated left a significant vacuum in Jerusalem. The period called the exile is a highly technical concept and difficult for Bible students to understand. Anstey (1973:222) posits, 'The date of the exile is the 3rd year of Jehoiakim ... 605 BCE.' Guillaume (2005:91) claims, 'The destruction of Jerusalem marked the beginning of what Old Testament scholars commonly call the exilic period.' The exile of Judah to Babylon according to Lamentations 1:3 and 2 Kings 25:21 and the exile of some persons from Jerusalem according to 2 Kings 24:15-17 together with king Jehoiachin should be differentiated. After Jehoiachin had been taken to Babylon, Zedekiah was appointed king and palaces were not destroyed; however, after Zedekiah had been taken away, there was no more king and palaces, and parts of the city wall were destroyed. Suffice it to say the exile era began with the total destruction of palaces and the temple in 586 BCE, while the exile of persons began with the

exile of Jehoiachin in 597 BCE. These assertions are supported by Davies (2007:155) in his understanding of what historians mean by the 'exilic' era.

After the final deportation, the exile was fully accomplished, since there was no governance structure in Babylon. However, the concept of the exile could have been an expression of ideology that assumed that since the elite had been taken to Babylon, their absence from the land was tantamount to the absence of the nation from its land. For that matter, the determination or quantification of the impact of the exile is found in the number of persons that had to leave their home country or city.

4.5.2.1 Actual deportation numbers

Three deportations are recognised to have happened under the auspices of Babylon. The first deportation occurred when Jehoiachin was deposed and exiled in 597 BCE. Bruce (1997:80) posits: 'The city was taken on March, 597 BC, and Jehoiachin, with many members of the royal family and the leading statesmen and courtiers, was taken captive to Babylon. So too were many other members of the higher ranks of Judean society – three thousand in all.'

Beek (1963:127) concurs with the qualitative definition of the class of people first deported and points out that such a deportation was meant to weaken Judah militarily and incapacitate the possibility of national governance, even though the Davidic dynasty was honoured when Zedekiah (son of Josiah) was made a vassal king. Miller and Hayes (1986:419-420) contrast the record of the book of 2 Kings with the book of Jeremiah regarding the first deportation. The authors point out that 2 Kings 24:14 reports that 10 000 captives were carried away, and 2 Kings 24:16 reports that 7000 captives and 1000 craftsmen and smiths were deported in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:12). Jeremiah 52:28 reports that 3023 Judeans were exiled in the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar. Nevins (2006:5) supports the statement that 3023 Judeans were deported in the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar. The passage in 2 Chronicles 36:9-10 only reports the exile of Jehoiachin and not the other captives. In fact, Jeremiah 37:1-2 only summarily indicates that Zedekiah was appointed to reign instead of Jehoiachin and not much is said. Therefore, if Jeremiah had been in hiding due to the threats of Jehoiakim and was only freed during Zedekiah's reign after the first deportation, his account on

the number of the first deportees may not be very reliable. A Bible writer, who might have observed the actual arrival of the deportees in Babylon, could have presented facts that are more credible. Thus, the summary of Jeremiah that reports only 3023 deportees might not have been the actual number, whereas a total of ten thousand according to 2 Kings would be acceptable.

The second deportation, according to Beek (1963:129) and Herrmann (1981:291), took place after Zedekiah's rebellion and during the fall of Jerusalem, when around 832 men were deported to Babylon. Bruce (1997:83-84) dates the second deportation to have occurred in August 587 BCE. The writer continues to explain that a month after the humiliation of Zedekiah, Nebuzaradan came to execute judgement on Jerusalem by looting and destroying the temple and the palace and provides the following details: 'A number of the principal citizens, including the chief priests as well as military and civil leaders, were executed. Many members of the upper and middle classes were deported to Babylonia, to swell the numbers of those who had been deported earlier.'

Miller and Hayes (1986:419-420) highlight that the report of 2 Kings 25:11 claims that the people who had been left in the city, and the deserters together with the rest of the multitude were deported. Jeremiah 52:29 accounts for 832 deportations, with which Nevins (2006:5) agrees and says that it took place in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. The book of 2 Chronicles 36:20 only reports that Nebuchadnezzar took those who had remained in Jerusalem to Babylon without stating the numbers. However, it should be stated that more executions occurred in 586 BCE, according to 2 Kings 25:18-21. Due to the mass execution, the number given in Jeremiah 52:29 of 832 captives being exiled may perhaps be accepted, since Jeremiah was free to witness the event.

The third deportation occurred after Gedaliah had been assassinated. Herrmann (1981:291) dates the tragic event to have transpired in 582 BCE, when 745 Judeans were taken captive by Nebuzaradan as instructed by Nebuchadnezzar. Miller and Hayes (1986:420) indicate that the book of Kings seems to be silent about the third deportation, while Jeremiah 52:30 accounts that 745 Judeans were deported in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, which is precisely

the comprehension of Nevins (2006:5). The number of the third deportation would be reasonable as 745.

Miller and Hayes (1986:420) indicate that the sum of the deportations was 4600. This is calculated based on the first deportation being 3023, the second deportation being 832 and the third deportation being 745. This calculation is based on Jeremiah's calculated summary. The number that Jeremiah gives for first deportees is disputable, even biblically, as far as its source is concerned, whether it had been Jeremiah himself or his students or even admirers. If the numbers of the second and third deportations according to Jeremiah would be acceptable as 832 and 745 respectively, they add up to 1577. This number of 1577 and the 10 000 captives of the first deportation add up to 11577 deportees.

4.5.2.2 Indefinite emigrations

During the reign of the Babylonian Empire, not only the deportations affected or reduced the population of Jerusalem, but also the emigrations of Judeans who might have resorted to expediency or fled from the expected punishment by the Babylonians. Lipschits (2005:105) states, 'The Benjaminites were joined by refugees who apparently had fled from Judah during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem.' If the residents of the Benjamin and Judah territories would still be in Judah, this kind of emigration from Jerusalem would have been insignificant. However, the author (2005:106) points out that some refugees 'were also in Moab, Ammon, Edom and in all the countries' Bigger (1994:233) reckons that the Jewish community was '... dispersed very widely.'

Guillaume (2005:92) portrays the consequent population picture saying, 'Deportations, hunger, war casualties and subsequent immigrations certainly reduced the population of the kingdom to 15 000, a tenth of what it had been in 600 BCE.' Provan *et al.* (2003:284) approaches the situation in a positive way saying, 'Even after the depopulation of the land, many remained.' Sacchi (2000:50) argues that the concept found in 2 Chronicles that all Judah was carried to Babylon and left a desolate space, which they reoccupied when they came back from exile, is not a true reflection of what transpired. The author seriously posits, 'Their existence is limited to the realm of post-exilic ideology and it is the merit of the recent historiography to have

emphasised the important role that Jerusalem continued to play for all Jews even during the exile.'

No biblical or historical scholar can quantify the emigrations from Judah that occurred during the Babylonian empire. Those who emigrated to safer places like the Benjamin territory and other places outside Judah land were especially the residents of Jerusalem who were in fear of death at the hands of Chaldeans. The emigrations could have been more than the deportations in numbers or vice versa. Subsequent to these emigrations, Judah was left with an incapacitated capital city, Jerusalem. The use of Mizpah as a capital city was disrupted and Judah was left with no governance center.

4.5.3 Religious state of affairs

The nation of Judah, known for their faith in God, were scattered during the exile. Some remained in Judah, some were exiled and others fled to neighbouring countries like Egypt, Ammon, Edom, Moab and others. The exile was also a blow to the cultic observances in Judah. Bright (1972:345) intimates, 'The Jews living in Babylon represented the cream of their country's political, ecclesiastical, and intellectual leadership – which is why they were selected for deportation.' It seems the only privileged group was in Babylon, because the ecclesiastical leadership was there.

4.5.3.1 Religion in Judah

Sacchi (2000:49) claims, 'It is certain that priests who controlled it in 587 were all deported to Babylon, but worship of some kind must have remained and, therefore, new priests must have taken the place of those who had been carried away.' Miller and Hayes (1986:426) indicate that the books of Kings and Ezra give the impression that cultic practices came to an end after the destruction of Jerusalem. Furthermore, the authors argue that around the assassination of Gedaliah, 80 men came to Mizpah to offer some grain offerings, which implies that it had become a worship site. Historical consensus is that the men who met Ishmael during the time of the assassination of Gedaliah were en route to Jerusalem.

Bright (1972:344) speculates that those who had fled to some places outside of Judah or Jerusalem came back to join the remnant. The author states, 'But their estate was miserable and precarious....' Bright (1972:344) argues that the destroyed temple, though in ashes, continued to be a holy place that still attracted believers, even from Israel in the north. These believers continued to perform sacrificial rites in the area where the temple had been. Miller and Hayes (1986:426) refer to the book of Lamentations and maintain that there might have been cultic practices on the site of the temple in Jerusalem. Leuchter (2010:590) highlights the role of remnant Levites saying, 'Their influence likely stood behind the communal laments regarding the present and the appeals to hallowed antiquity in the hopes of future restoration.' It is not clear whether the pilgrims that would visit the temple site of Jerusalem would have the privilege of ecclesiastical assistance at the destroyed temple or if they would merely use their discretion in performing whatever intended rites. To claim firmly that some cultic practices continued on the site of the destroyed temple is baseless since not much is documented about it in the Bible and other historical sources.

Since religion is not only effective in cultic areas, but a way of life also portrays one's religious fervour, the lifestyle of the Judeans who had remained in Judah actually informs us further about the religious state of affairs in Judah. Bright (1972:345) explains that most of the Israelites from the north who had been restored to the Jerusalem cult at the time of King Josiah 'practiced a Yahwism of a highly syncretistic sort.' The author continues to say that Josiah's temporary endeavour had not achieved rudimentary transformation. Beek (1963:128) remarks that Ezekiel saw, in a vision of the desecration and destruction of the temple, that some people were worshiping Asherah and the sun in the temple area. The author asserts, 'A time of syncretism, of religious dilution, had begun and old faith had collapsed.' Yates (2006:12) accentuates, 'The Judeans in the land after the fall of Jerusalem are the object of judgement rather than the recipients of blessing because they persist in sins that necessitated the judgement of exile in the first place.' Religious life in Judah did not appear to have improved, but to have remained the same and therefore undeserving of God's approval or blessing.

Guillaume (2005:93) says a sanctuary in Bethel was used during the exile and some saved scrolls were preserved in Bethel and states, ‘... Benjamin was now saving the remnants of Judah.’ Pfeiffer (1962:44) explains that since the province of Judah was abolished and incorporated into the province of Samaria, where the God of the Judeans was recognised and assumes, ‘Their distinctive faith was in the sanctity of Mount Gerizim as the Temple site ... This ... was not implemented until the Sanctuary was built on Mount Gerizim in post-exilic times.’ The Jerusalem temple could not function during the exile, and whether another cultic site was developed during the exile to replace the Jerusalem temple is not very clear. Whatever religious activity that might have been performed in Judah during the exile, it was not significant and sufficiently prevalent to emerge or stand out and be recognised after the exile.

4.5.3.2 Religion of Judeans in Babylon

Not all priests were executed during all the Babylonian sieges of Jerusalem. Some of the temple servants were taken to Babylon since they were part of the elite. Kaiser (1998:425) declares, ‘Although a remnant remained in the land of Israel, the spiritual and intellectual center shifted to Babylon for the most part.’ Practically, there was no cult in Jerusalem since the cruel event of the execution of some key cultic servants, as recorded in 2 Kings 25:18 and Jeremiah 52:24-27. Except for lamentations, carrying out proper cultic practices in Jerusalem posed a risk to the life of the participants. Blenkinsopp (2009:2) explains Judaism as a religion that placed considerable emphasis on the law, with additions of priestly rituals and more laws that are religious. Judaism originated around the time of the fall of Jerusalem and developed during the exile period. Betlyon (2005:7) succinctly says, ‘Significant changes in religious practice occurred in those decades, including a new emphasis upon the reading and study of the Torah and the Prophets. “Judaism” – the name itself new had begun its evolution.’ This kind of faith was conceptualised in Babylon with emphasis on various aspects. However, Davies (1999:76-77) argues that the deportees could have coexisted in Babylon by their very nature, but it may not be true that they carried some literature with them for any purpose. The writer emphatically says that almost nothing is known about the life either of the exiles or of the remnant. The differences could have added to their faith what it lacked before the exile. They truly repented and eliminated practices that displeased God. Soggin (1993:268) states that circumcision, keeping of the

Sabbath and some 'dietary' rules received emphasis to identify the Jews as people upholding such principles or laws. Fohrer (1973:318) shows that the perception that God could not forsake Zion as a matter of covenant keeping was revised and they came to the insight that God could be worshipped anywhere.

It is interesting that a faith in bondage could be as productive as Judaism. Kaiser (1998:425) says that in Babylon, the Talmud emerged and Babylon became the hub of various collections of biblical passages and manuscripts. The legacy of the Babylonian exile is not only about the birth of a new faith, but also about the fact that some religious literature was composed and compiled. Furthermore, Fohrer (1973:312) posits:

'This faith nevertheless possessed such attraction that during the Exile people belonging to other nations and religions attached themselves to it, presumably for the most part deportees from other nations dwelling in the vicinity of the Judahite settlement. Thus during the very period when Yahwism was totally dependent on a foreign power it demonstrated its victorious strength; during this period; indeed, the notion of Israel's being to all nations, the idea of Israel's mission, was born.'

The period of the exile was not all about doom and gloom in Babylon. The deportation of the elite, which was inclusive of priests and Levites, served a religious transformative and restorative purpose. Indeed, trusting in God's advice proved to be rewarding, since God advised them to submit to Babylon through the successful ministries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Even though they were forced to go to Babylon, they eventually survived the Babylonian power in Babylon.

4.5.3.3 Religion of Judeans in Egypt

2 Kings 25:26 reports that after the assassination of Gedaliah most people fled to Egypt, because they feared Babylon. Jeremiah 41-43 reports that, under the leadership of Johanan, son of Kareah, an attempt of Ishmael to deport some Jews to Ammon was aborted. Despite enquiring from God through Jeremiah as to what to do, the remnant nucleus of Jerusalem, who consisted of army officers and great and lesser people, disobeyed and went to Egypt, taking Baruch and Jeremiah with them. The New Bible Dictionary (1996:278) indicates that some Jews

peacefully chose to emigrate and dwell in Egypt and other places outside the land of Judah. The New Bible Dictionary (1996: 278) regards the Aramaic Papyri discovered in the Elephantine area as indicators that a Jewish community was existent in Egypt.

The Judeans that had fled to other countries like Egypt did not necessarily forsake their faith. Their new residence could either have enhanced or hindered the growth of their faith. Leuchter (2008:132) with reference to Jeremiah's exhortations to the Jews that went to Egypt presents them as people who worshipped the Queen of Heaven as they had done prior to Josiah's reforms. The author posits, 'They have chosen to eliminate JHWH from their religious world, and YHWH answers in kind, essentially disowning the community.' Suffice it to say what transpired in Babylon did not necessarily occur in Egypt. Fohrer (1973:333) points out that the Israelites of the Elephantine island are said to have moved away from the proper belief in Yahweh, because they maintained that misfortune occurred due to the reforms of Josiah, which could have angered the gods because they were not worshipped anymore. Rogerson and Davies (1989:171) explain that around the seventh and sixth century BCE, some residue of papyri was discovered in a Jewish temple in the Elephantine area. The papyri name the gods that the Jews worshipped as Yahu, Bethel, Harambethel, Asambethel and Anat. Thus, syncretism was the order of the day among the Judeans in Egypt. Responsibility for the disaster of the exile was ascribed to Josiah's reforms of eradicating religious groups that were not Yahwistic in nature. The Elephantine Jews sought to apportion blame elsewhere in refusing to accept responsibility for the disaster. It appears that the Judeans in Judah and in Egypt did not repent of their idolatry and failed to recognise the control of God in the disaster or to remember the messages of Jeremiah regarding their imminent subjection to Babylon.

4.5.4 Socio- political status quo in Judah

Babylon did not necessarily set out to destroy the cultic practices of Judeans. Their main objective was to keep Judah under control as a vassal state in order to receive tribute and to remain the predominant power or Empire, even though there were connotations of divine superiority or inferiority in victory or defeat in the Ancient Near East in those days. The political systems and structures were the main target of the Neo-Babylonian super power.

4.5.4.1 Political status

Bruce (1997:76) regards the death of King Josiah as 'the end of Judah's independence.' Sacchi (2000:49) identifies those who had been deported as '... the rich, the ruling class both in political and economic terms.' Miller and Hayes (1986:421) claim that the accurate particulars of the political position of Judah immediately after the devastation of Jerusalem are uncertain and controversial. The existence of Judah as a vassal state or even as a province was not nearly as bad as suggested, as though it would not have existed at all and would not have had any particular governance structure. Pfeiffer (1962:42) states that 'with the destruction of Jerusalem, Judah ceased to exist as a sovereign state.' It was better when Judah under Gedaliah was organised as a province or a vassal state deprived of its legitimate royalty, because Judah still existed as an entity not yet swallowed but only subjected. However, Bruce (1997:87) explains that around the time of the assassination of Gedaliah, all Judah excluding the Negev was reckoned with the province of Samaria and asserts, 'All political activity in Judea ceased.' Pfeiffer (1962:43) intimates, 'The province of Judah ... was abolished and its territory was incorporated into the neighboring province of Samaria.' That was the real political emptiness of Judah. It was caused by the imprudence of some Judeans whose rebellion and fighting was congruent to shooting themselves in the foot or suicidal at a national level. During the destruction of Jerusalem, Babylon purposed to dismantle the political structure of Judah, which was not submissive to Babylon. After the actual destruction, Babylon accomplished what it had set out to do, not knowing that God was the one who permitted them to execute their plans.

4.5.4.2 Social status

What kind of social life could the Judeans have had without a governance system close to them and the moral guidance of a functional, consistent and legitimate religious system or organisation? Perhaps it was like the time of the Judges, when people did as they pleased, because they had no king. Soggin (1993:268) comments on the situation of the remnant of Judah, which appears to have been harder than that of the exiles. The writer (1993:268) states, 'A negative factor to set against that was the destruction of social and economic structures in which those who had benefitted could have expressed themselves and developed.'

Pfeiffer (1962:44) reports that because of the Babylonian victory over Judah most places remained unoccupied for a long time during the exile. The writer continues to explain that the Edomites and Arabians encroaching from the south took some places, and the Ammonites and various peoples from Trans-Jordan came to take as much land as they wanted. All these foreign tribes came much closer to the heart of the land of Judah. Noth (1959:291) says that the remnant population of Judah became mixed with the newly introduced elite from other places. Pfeiffer (1962:45) portrays the dilution and decay of the Judeans saying, 'For fifty years after the destruction of Jerusalem, Judah was left to its own devices ... the inhabitants of Judah – Jews, and non-Jews – had adjusted to a new mode of life.' Pfeiffer (1962:44) presents these foreigners to have been dominant over the Judean remnant. Thus, the Judeans who lost their leaders to Babylon were in danger of losing the essence of Judean identity. This infiltration of the Judean territory by foreigners further emptied or reduced the vigour of Judean identity.

4.5.4.3 Unknown lifestyle

The lack of information about the kind of life in Judah during the exilic period is indicative of tremendous disruption of life in Judah. Davies (1999:77) postulates, 'We can in fact add very little to the meager data we have concerning Judeans between Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus.' The cultural dilution or amalgamation of lifestyles in Judah spelled a complete end to the efficacy of pre-exilic faith.

Herrmann (1981:289) contrasts earlier scholars who believed that proper Judean existence prevailed only in the exile with recent scholars who believe that some unique Judean livelihood was existent during the exile '... despite difficulty of describing such developments in any detail.' Miller and Hayes (1986:437) summarise the restoration attempts of the returnees in Judah who went about their business 'practically ignore the on-going life and history of the Judean community that remained in the land and never experienced the exile.' Pfeiffer (1962:43) says that the accounts of the exile as recorded in Ezekiel, Kings and Ezra-Nehemiah with their desolation overtones are over-exaggerated according to some older theologians. However, Lipschits (2005:104) says that despite losing the urban functionality the people of the remnant were able to continue with their former lifestyle 'within the new administrative

framework.’ It is interesting that the issue of whether any particular lifestyle continued during the exile or not is a matter of the personal conviction of a specific author. To a certain extent, the returnees stand accused by Miller and Hayes (1986:437) of disregarding the existence of such life during the exile. It does not help believing in probable historical events, but the available historical facts retrieved from reliable sources should be accepted as opposed to reconstructing unknown history in disputing the history we have at hand. Berquist (2008:46) seeks a middle ground thus:

‘Whether or not Babylonian-period Jerusalem was abandoned and empty after 587 B.C.E, it is clear that Jerusalem experienced a substantial de-urbanization. When the Persian Empire resettled a Babylonian-born, Persian-loyal population into Jerusalem, these people not only moved into a relatively uninhabited city, but also into a locally abandoned lifestyle of urban living.’

Despite the attempts of promulgating the idea of the existence of a specific Judean identity during the exile, there is no definite explanation of such a kind of life. Miller and Hayes (1986:426) consider the probable practice of cultic services in Jerusalem or Mizpah and the need of priests to take the lead and state the following:

‘We hear nothing in the books of II Kings and Jeremiah about the condition of the priesthood after the destruction of Jerusalem except the notice that Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the second priest and the three keepers of the threshold were put to death by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah....’

Concisely, Beek (1963:135) declares, ‘The Babylonian exile ended the history of Judah and Jerusalem temporarily.’ Kaiser (1998:422) says that virtually all the knowledge about Judeans at hand during the period of the exile concerns the deportees’ departure, which resulted in a residential void in Judah. The author emphasises that there are no details about what was happening in Judah during the exile.

The belief that life went on as normal in Judah during the exile lacks substantiation so grossly that it helplessly and immediately bears the label of being a hypothesis. Since there is nothing definite about a particular Judean lifestyle in Judah during the exilic period, the indefiniteness of the status quo borders the sentiment or ideology of the emptiness of Judah. This came about

because foreign people's influence that entered and dominated Judah, utterly and ultimately destroyed either Yahwism or pre-exilic weak and God-rejected faith or any kind of Judean reform or renewal. The indistinctness of Judean lifestyle itself concedes non-existence with connotations or overtones of emptiness. Jeremiah 40:7 portrays the remnant that was to be governed by Gedaliah as the poorest people. Obviously, such people had no potential of quickly developing themselves to restore anything in Judah.

4.6 Fall of Babylon

The Babylonian Empire, which destroyed the city of Jerusalem and reduced the land of Judah leaving it unacknowledged as a political entity, did not prevail for more than seventy years as a dominant power over the Levant. Miller and Hayes (1986:428) point out that even before the end of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, there were economic signs of a possible collapse of the Babylonian regime. The authors cite, among other factors that led to the demise of Babylon, the economic decline caused by expensive and competitive royal constructions of infrastructure connecting Media, Lydia and Egypt with Mesopotamia, and the deficient management of Babylonian royalty.

The major reason for the fall of Babylon was religious in nature and became manifest in the reign of Nabonidus (555-539 BCE), who had a religious background. Miller and Hayes (1986:428) say that Nabonidus was a son of a priestess of Sin, the moon god, and he regarded the worship of Sin as a unifying factor. The writers (1986:429) go on to tell that Nabonidus built a sanctuary for the Sin deity in Ur and made his daughter a priestess like his mother, who lived up to the age of 104. Betlyon (2005:6) reports that Nabonidus replaced Marduk with Sin as the 'supreme deity.' Beaulieu (1993:254) indicates that this act was a severe religious imposition. Miller and Hayes (1986:429) say that the priests of Marduk, the sun god, disliked the king's emphasis and efforts to entrench Sin worship. The king's act caused dissatisfaction among the citizens of Babylonia, according to Ackroyd (1968:20), who posits, 'This discontent within Babylonia made the advent of Cyrus acceptable to the older influential groups, and for the exiles it appeared to offer a hope of a renewed and better future.'

In addition to religious unhappiness, Betlyon (2005:6) says that Nabonidus left his own capital and attempted to increase the territory of his Empire. Having left his son, Belshazzar, to rule in his place he stayed in Arabian areas. Miller and Hayes (1986:428) indicate that his stay outside the capital city lasted for more than a decade and he was in Arabia for the following reasons: the evilness of the citizens of Babylon, the sins of the citizens against Sin, the citizens devouring each other like dogs and lastly Sin making him leave Babylon. Babylon, with such a king, was bound to fall.

Furthermore, in addition to having elevated the Sin deity above the rest and staying outside the capital for a long time, Nabonidus continued to annoy Babylonian citizens even more in wielding his power. Beaulieu (1993:242) posits, 'King Nabonidus ordered a massive gathering of the gods of Sumer and Akkad into the capital.' Bright (1972:360) indicates that many people were disillusioned by such an act. However, Beaulieu (1993:257) seeks to explain this act by pointing out that the idea behind gathering statues and bringing them to the capital city was to save them from being taken to other countries should the enemy win. The author continues to postulate the following: 'The gods would leave their earthly abodes, abandoning their land to its fate. By moving the cultic personnel of each god to the capital, Nabonidus was ensuring the continued substantial presence of the deities at his side.' The act was geared to consolidate the power of all deities in defence of the capital city. This act or order could have been an attempt to impress followers of such deities that by preventing foreigners to take their safety from them he acted in their interest and that he was acknowledging their deities.

The despondency of the citizens about the king's leadership created political fluidity. Ackroyd (1968:17) states, 'The wider position of Babylonian power has to be seen in relation to that of the Medes, whose help in the overthrow of Assyria marked them out as chief allies or rivals of the Babylonians. Eventually this was to be an important factor in the downfall of the Neo-Babylonian empire'

Guillaume (2005:96) after explaining the Median aid to Babylon to oust the Assyrian power from supremacy in 612 BCE says that after seven decades, the Medes teamed up with the Persians to defeat Babylon. Kaiser (1998:418-419) breaking down the factual matter of the

overthrow of Babylon says the final war to overthrow the Empire occurred outside Babylon at Opis along the Tigris River. Under the leadership of his General Ugbaru, Cyrus won without fighting on October 12, 539 BCE. The author explicates that the water of the Euphrates was diverted and the city was penetrated using the riverbed. The Persian troop encountered almost no resistance and managed to arrest Nabonidus in his attempt to escape. Bruce (1997:92) says that the actual entry into Babylon occurred on 29 October 539 BCE.

Finally, the Empire of Babylon has ended to the joy of some of its citizens and the Judean exiles, who had been anticipating its fall and was hoping for a new regime that would release them from bondage in Babylon.

4.7 Post-exilic Judah

Finegan (1999:266) indicates that the decree for rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem was issued in the first year of Cyrus, which was 538/537 BCE. This date marks the actual end of the exile and the beginning of the post-exilic era. The exilic era had lasted for about 52 years if actually counted from 586 BCE. God promised restoration through Jeremiah as it is written in Jeremiah 33. In chapter 50:9, 10, the nations to succeed Babylon are identified as a coalition of nations from the north. Soggin (1993:276) points out that Deutero-Isaiah (44, 45) foretold the exiles that Cyrus, the anointed, would liberate the exiles as one used by God. Provan *et al.* (2003:285) says that Cyrus was the son of Cambyses I, King of Persia, and was married to a Median princess, whose father was king Astyages. The writer further elucidates that Cyrus united the Persians with the Medes. Grabbe (2006:266) indicates that Cyrus grew up in Persia, a vassal state of Media at that time. The author further explains that Cyrus defeated the Medes. In an attack by his father-in-law, he prevailed. He seized Ecbatana and made it the capital city of Persia, even though Media was always an alternative name for the Empire of Persia.

Cyrus found Babylon full of unhappy exiles and reasoned that it would be manageable to run a province of Babylon composed of comfortable citizens. Thus, he thought of cancelling the existent deportation rules, according to Bruce (1997:93), who further mentions that Cyrus'

approach was that of recognizing all deities that had previously been disregarded and even carried to Babylon by the kings of Babylon. Noth (1959:303) states:

‘After his entry into Babylon, Cyrus revived the local religions in the Land of the Two Rivers, restoring to their traditional places the divine images which the last Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus had arbitrarily moved to the city of Babylon, thereby presenting himself in marked contrast to Nabonidus, as the protector of the ancient religious traditions.’

Cyrus neither favoured the Jews exclusively nor firmly believed in the God of the Jews. The easy seizure of Babylon due to its disgruntled residents, who had decided not to resist the Medo-Persian troops, did not cause destruction like that of Jerusalem. Kaiser (1998:420) posits the following, ‘In the first year of his reign in Babylon, Cyrus issued a decree authorizing the rebuilding of all temples of the gods that had been conquered by the Babylonians and an order to restore whatever vessels of gold and silver that had been taken and stored in Babylonia.’

Among the exiles or nations to be favoured by Cyrus were the Judeans in Babylon. Bruce (1997:93) says that Cyrus issued two decrees ‘... one authorizing the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem’ and ‘... the other authorizing the return to Judaea of a large group of exiles.’

Noth (1959:305) emphasises that the first decree was issued in 538 BCE, the first year of Cyrus. Bright (1972:361) and Bruce (1997:94) show that the costs of rebuilding the temple were to be borne by the Empire of Persia and that temple treasures taken to Babylon were to be restored to the temple. However, Cataldo (2010:67) indicates that the returnees were given religious liberty, not political liberty, since governors like Nehemiah were appointed by Persia. In the context of Judah, only the Judean faith was to be restored and not the political system, probably because the Persians did not envisage to set vassal states free. The restoration of the cult was to proceed under the reign of Persia.

4.7.1 The Return

With the decrees issued, the Jews in Babylonia were free to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, but the books of Esther 3:6 and Daniel 6:28 indicate that some Jews remained in Judah. It appears that royal servants from the Babylonian regime like Daniel were not released to go.

The number of the Jews that returned to primarily rebuild the temple in Jerusalem seems to exceed the number of those that were exiled. The concept of the return does not necessarily mean that only those that were actually exiled from Jerusalem went to Jerusalem, but it is probably inclusive of persons born in Babylon and perhaps some proselytes. Kaiser (1998:421) states, 'The total number who returned under Sheshbazzar / Zerubbabel was just short of 50,000: 49,897. It included 42,360 returnees, 7,337 slaves, and 200 singers (Ezra 2:64-65).' The writer apparently regards Sheshbazzar as Zerubbabel and further argues, 'If not, Sheshbazzar must have died shortly after his leading the first return back to Jerusalem, for he is not mentioned again in the text.' Earlier, a number of 11,577 deportees was arrived at in the section that dealt with actual deportations (see 4.5.2. above). Kaiser (1998:421) speculates that 25,000 persons were taken into exile. The figures, 11,577 and 25,000, indicate that the actual early returnees were by far more than those who were taken to exile.

However, Grabbe (2006:274) argues that the number of the returnees according to the book of Ezra-Nehemiah is a 'myth' formulated by the author of the book. Grabbe (2006:274) asserts, 'Once the imperial decree is removed from the equation, what we would expect would be a trickle of people from Babylonia immigrating to *Yehud* over decades, perhaps even the entire two centuries of Persian rule.' The author continues to use archaeological evidence to accentuate that what was evident was population depletion as opposed to remarkable population increase. Lipschits (2005:372) also casts doubt on the account of Ezra-Nehemiah by indicating that there is no evidence of population growth between the close of the sixth century BCE and early in the fifth century BCE. However, Ezra 2:1, 70 indicates that each of the returnees went to their own town, meaning that not all of them returned to Jerusalem; hence, there is no sign or report of a significant population growth.

Whether the numbers of the returnees according to Ezra-Nehemiah are true or false is not pertinent, but the question is, did they find any sign of emptiness in Judah? The fact that whatever number of thousands that returned first could be accommodated within Jerusalem and surrounding areas without historically or archaeologically documented records or signs of overpopulation means that the exile did reduce the population of Jerusalem. The scholars that

dispute the number of the first returnees do not use or mention any measuring tools, but only reason from the absence of evidence as if the absence of evidence would truly mean that nothing happened. A pertinent question would be, besides conflict over land issues, what else would signal a dramatic population growth? Probably, the size of the emptiness of Jerusalem was big enough to absorb all the early returnees of whatever number. Since only the poor were left in Jerusalem, there might have been no urban settlement and lifestyle in Jerusalem; hence, there was no evidence of population increase as a result of the return.

Yates (2006:4) highlights that according to these returnees, the remnant had persevered with their sins and therefore, they (the exiles) had to repent and be better than the remnant in order to find joy in the promised restoration. Davies (1999:81) indicates that the returnees were composed of two parties, a party called “Yahweh-alone” and a former “priesthood” party. The author states that they were against the remnant and regarded them as the “people of the land.” The first return led by Sheshbazzar was not considered as a reunion with the remnant as common sense would anticipate. The returnees and the remnant had grown into two different opposing extremes; thus, a smooth reunion was impracticable.

4.7.2 Early Persian Jerusalem

After the devastation of the depopulation phenomenon and the state of Judah being in limbo indefinitely, some abnormalities were bound to occur especially in Jerusalem, the destroyed capital city of Judah. The first aspect that was highly affected by the exilic period was the population of Judah. Pfeiffer (1962:105), after commenting on the excitement of the returnees, describes the state in which Judah was found as follows: ‘The country was desolate, and squatters from among the Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines and Samaritans had profited by the absence of the Jews by occupying the Judean countryside. The Samaritans in particular were openly hostile.’ Generally, the poor and the Benjaminites were not affected negatively by the exile and they probably still lived in their home areas. The exile of Judah relates with the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of most civil servants in Jerusalem. The non-existence of the civil servants including a lack of any defence mechanism of Judah made it easy for people of other states to encroach the land of Judah. Bright (1972:366) portrays the

state of Judah as a sparsely populated city that could not recover from destruction even after 75 years. Berquist (2008:46) describes Jerusalem as a “free-floating resource” or an “unassigned space” in 539 BCE. At that time, Jerusalem was not in the condition of a functional city and its population was minimal. In the words of Berquist (2008:45-46) it may be said, ‘Jerusalem itself had been severely damaged and would have been only marginally inhabited.’

Probably there was no motivation for Judeans to dwell in Jerusalem, since it was destroyed and its reconstruction would not be permissible during the time of the Babylonian Empire. Moreover, only the poorest people had been left behind and were only permitted to work on vineyards and not to settle in Jerusalem. Of course, to say Jerusalem was a desolate ruin or *tabula rasa* may be an overstatement, since Jerusalem was not necessarily cordoned off literally or figuratively. The poorest people could temporarily dwell in Jerusalem as they did their vine-dressing business. Some corpses could be buried in graves of Jerusalem if they were the nearest available burial sites. However, it is probable that no governance or cultic structure could be erected without provoking the Babylonian Empire. Those who lived in Jerusalem could have a rural lifestyle that would not give the impression that Jerusalem was being reconstructed.

After losing its existence as a state or province, especially after the assassination of Gedaliah, Jerusalem was useless yet cherished by Judeans as a capital for religious purposes. Naaman (2005: 403) argues that the condition of Judah remained unchanged immediately after the rise of Persia, but it was only made a province by Darius I in his governance restructuring program. With the permission to the returnees to reconstruct the temple, Jerusalem would experience a new beginning. Berquist (2008:41) succinctly posits, ‘In the Persian period, Jerusalem experienced a renaissance, a rebirth, a second origin.’ This new start recognised Judah as an entity and allowed the restoration of the Judean religion without limitations, but political independence was not granted. Bright (1972:363) says that Sheshbazzar was appointed to serve as prince of Judah or governor and he returned to Jerusalem with some Jews. The author indicates that some wealthy Jews in exile were willing to assist the reconstruction of the temple with finances. Berquist (2008:45) says, ‘... the empire produced Jerusalem, ordering its

settlement and construction. The empire directed the city's establishment and organization, whether through direct imperial decree or the appointment of local officials.' Jerusalem's rebirth was not free, but subject to a different imperial power and it had to function under different terms and conditions. It would not be the full restoration of Jerusalem as the capital of an independent country.

Berquist (2008:46-47) considers the use of cities in the Persian dispensation and largely defines post-exilic Jerusalem as a pure Persian city to serve Persian requirements and expectations. The author (2008:46) explains, 'In the Persian period, Jerusalem was a place for imperial governmental officials rather than for farmers.' The writer goes on to hint that even prior to the exile the elite would not produce their own food. According to Berquist (2008:47), 'The cities were not meant for habitation, and the main architecture was neither housing nor commerce, but large public spaces.' For civil purposes, the returnees would have not known Mizpah as the previous governance centre or would not even have thought of using it as a place from where to direct the reconstruction of the temple and where to establish civil governance. Jerusalem, like other cities, was not to be a normal place of residence, but a place for subjected governance and reformed cultic rites or services.

4.7.3 The reconstruction of the Temple

The downfall of Nabonidus was caused by religious factors related to his domestic god Sin, the moon god. It became obvious that Cyrus should centre his propaganda on religious grounds. As a result, Cyrus introduced a much-needed policy that would give religious freedom and thus make the subjects of his Empire relatively happy.

Trotter (2001:279) says that responding to the decree of Cyrus '... many Judahites, Benjaminites, priests and Levites went to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and their neighbors, who remained in Mesopotamia, made substantial financial contributions to the effort' Kaiser (1998:421) affirms that the decree was indeed issued in 538 BCE, the building materials were sourced from Tyre and Sidon and the foundation was laid in 536 BCE. The writer continues to highlight that subsequent to the completion of the foundation there was much weeping and

ecstatic singing. Furthermore, the writer indicates that those who had seen the Solomonic structure wept, because the new foundation was somewhat smaller than that of the Solomonic temple. Fohrer (1973:332) sees no difference in the size, but a more sober appearance is evident from his description: 'The new Temple was built on the site of the old and to its dimensions. The ark and the two pillars were no longer present; the ten lamp stands were replaced by a single one with seven branches.' There was no possibility of restoring the temple structure to its original condition with a properly furnished holy of holies compartment and the lamp stands to which Fohrer refers.

The exilic period had not only left the temple destroyed, but the festivals and rituals that were performed in the temple were disrupted by the Babylonian deportations of the clergy and execution of some Judean priests.

4.7.3.1 The contingencies of temple reconstruction

The Persian Empire had given the returnees permission primarily to rebuild the temple, which lay in ruins. The decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:2-4) that authorised the willing returnees to rebuild the temple says nothing about the remnant. According to Ezra 4:2, the Samaritans felt that they were part of the Israelites since they learnt from the residue of Israelites in the north to make sacrifices to the God of Israel from the time of Assyrian domination.

Kaiser (1998:421-422) portrays a picture of the identity of the Samaritans and what they had become and how they related to Judah or Jerusalem. The author enunciates that the Samaritans were the Israelites that were not deported by Assyria and mixed with the people that had been brought to Israel by the Assyrians. The writer (1998:422) hints at the fact that this mixed people even intermarried with remnant Judeans. Therefore, they became a mixture of people regarded by the returnees as people of the lands. Bedford (2002:150) posits, 'The repatriates viewed the "people(s) of the land(s)" as self-confessed foreigners who posed a threat to their community's cultural and political identity....' According to Ezra 3:3, these people were feared by the returnees as they had already begun to build the altar and to restore daily sacrificial rites, the Feast of Tabernacles, New Moon sacrifices and other feasts. They restored some cultic practices even before the temple was completed.

Mixed, as they were, Olyan (2004:12) indicates that the Samaritans wanted to play a role in the reconstruction of the temple. Bruce (1997:94) highlights that at the time of the return the remnant (including the Samaritans) were developing the worship area in Bethel, since they had decided to develop it rather than the one in Jerusalem. Apparently, when the returnees came back with the mission to reconstruct the temple in Jerusalem, the remnant decided to join the returnees in their mission. The author (1997:94) reports that their help was rejected and says, 'Thus the old division between the two parts of the nation was certain to continue; a more cooperative response to the northerners' approach might have helped to heal the breach.'

However, Bruce (1997:94) finds justification for the rejection of the help of Samaritans, because the returnees would have been 'swamped' by the remnant and claims that 'the new Jerusalem community preserved certain religious ideals of great value which might easily have disappeared if north and south united.' Olyan (2004:15) says that by excluding the remnant the returnees were upholding the so-called 'Holiness Code', which was completed in Babylon and in which the remnant was not schooled. It is interesting that during the exile, some people in Babylon joined Judaism and yet, those who were found in Jerusalem were not accepted but totally rejected.

4.8 Perceptions of the exile

Usually, the question is whether Judah was literally emptied of all residents or what the concept of Judah being exiled means. Studying the Bible writers' documentation of the exile, the perceptions of the writer and of the people that lived during the exile in and outside Judah allows for an interesting interpretation. Fohrer (1973:308) considers the historical thought paradigms of the Judeans who survived the exilic period in and outside Judah. He concludes that some Judeans thought that the reforms of Josiah angered some gods, especially the gods that were destroyed and those whose shrines were destroyed, while others thought that the exile and destruction of the city was due to the judgement of God, who had been disobeyed by Judah. The writer goes on to say others actually doubted the very existence of God. In particular, the author (1973:309) states, 'Thus popular religion came to prevail with more Canaanite than Yahwistic features.' The remnant does not seem to have had common

perceptions, but completely diverse views. Sacchi (2000:53-54) claims that the remnant believed that God was present in the destroyed temple protecting His people, while the exiles generally believed that the remnant was not under God's protection. The author refers to Ezekiel 11:17; 15:20; 38 in order to accentuate the fact that '... the Glory of God had left the temple'

Nevins (2006:5) concludes that the problem is that the editors of the Bible could not work out conflicting ideas in doing their work of writing or copying. The writer referring to 2 Kings 25:12, 21, which says, '... and he exiled Judah from its land,' argues that this statement negates the earlier indication that not all of Judah was exiled. The author (2006:16) further claims, 'The authors/editors of 2 Kings 25, writing probably at least a generation after these events had taken place, may have had to sift through conflicting accounts – and ideological issues were more important to them than documenting events in their precise historical sequence.'

However, even the history by Bible writers shows that Judah, even Jerusalem, was not entirely uninhabited during the course of the exile. This also applies to the period of devastation, which culminated in the destruction of the city and temple. Nevertheless, what was left in Jerusalem was not sheer desolation. Long before any prophecy or indication of the actual exile, Leviticus 26:14-44 alludes to an exile eventuality, just as God said that eating the fruit of the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden would result in death. Briefly, the Bible writers did not write pure history, but they wrote about the fulfilment of theological possibilities should there be a need for an exile experience in order to curtail sin (Leviticus 26:40-42). The book of 2 Chronicles 36:21 refers to the Sabbath rest, which the land enjoyed and the seventy years of exile that were completed. The concept of the land enjoying the Sabbath rest is derived directly from Leviticus 26:43. If the Bible writers would have chosen to use the word 'enjoy' without reference to an earlier warning, they would have been clearly sarcastic, because there was nothing to enjoy and the writers or composers of Lamentations were not in a joyful mood either. The issue of the seventy years of serving is derived from Jeremiah 25:11, 12; 29:10. The exile of Judah began in 586 BCE and ended in 538 BCE. Finegan (1999:266) supports 538 BCE as the incontrovertible end of the exile. The exile lasted for about 48 or 59 years depending on the

perception of the commencement date of the exile. The prophecy of seventy years was not precisely fulfilled and the very Bible writers knew it, but they were writing theology as opposed to history. The story begins with the Pentateuch and ends with the writers of Biblical books that reflect on the causes and effects of the exile.

4.8.1 Total destruction

The impression of the total destruction of Judah is not substantiated by either non-biblical historical sources or the Bible itself. The actual place concerned was Jerusalem. Lipschits (2005:83) puts forward his opinion as follows: '2 Kings 25:11 implies that the entire population of Jerusalem was deported. This fits the remainder of the context, which deals only with the destruction of the city; there is no reference to other parts of the kingdom.' Nevins (2006:14) refers to Jeremiah 44:2, 6, and 22, that present the destruction of Jerusalem to have resulted in desolation throughout the land of Judah. The author (2006: 14) suggests that the texts are of late composition after the exile had ended. The texts are contrasted with the picture one gets from Gedaliah who simply tells the people to "settle in the towns you have occupied."

In essence, any reference to emptiness or total destruction applies only to the city of Jerusalem. If the word 'Judah' is used when writing about Jerusalem, the meaning cannot be literal, but figurative in the light of Jerusalem being the capital city of Judah at that time. If Jerusalem had not been a capital city, the word 'Jerusalem' would not have been used interchangeably with the word, 'Judah'. The same applies to the Empires of Babylon and Rome being referred to as kingdoms, while they were not countries, but simply cities. The names 'Babylon' and 'Babylonia' or 'Mesopotamia' are used interchangeably to refer to the Neo-Babylonian kingdom. The actual name for the Roman Empire would be the 'Italian Empire', but it is commonly called 'Rome', as it was called then and even in our days. The name of the capital of Persia, 'Ecbatana', is seemingly not used interchangeably with Persia, because it was situated in the territory of Media and it had been the capital of Media before it was seized by Persia. Jerusalem was a city that could be regarded as Judah in a similar vein, since what happened in the city affected the whole nation of Judah. The entire representation of Judah was stationed in Jerusalem and the

destruction of such a strategic and significant place would mean that the entire Judah was left in disarray.

4.8.2 Legitimacy

The aspect of legitimacy is of pivotal significance in the debate of the impact of the Babylonian exile on Judah as a whole. In Judah, Jeremiah's prophetic ministry was disregarded all the time until the prophet was taken to Egypt after Gedaliah's murder, thus leaving no legitimacy in Judah throughout the exile period. Ezekiel and Daniel played a noteworthy prophetic role in Babylon. Jeremiah's advice of submission to Babylon was endorsed by the apparent presence of God in Babylon as opposed to his absence from Judah and Egypt after Jeremiah's disappearance from Judah. Yates (2006:14-15) observes that the remnant Judeans and Judeans in Egypt or in diaspora were not given any hope of restoration during the exilic period. The simple fact is that all civil and cultic legitimacy had been taken into exile.

Bigger (1994:236-237) states, 'Although misleading historically, the idea of a national exile is an important part of the Chronicler's presentation and must be recognised as such.' The writer (1994:237) asserts, 'So for the Chronicler all the true community were taken into exile, and all were eager to return at the first opportunity.' 2 Chronicles 36:20 indicates that after the destruction of the temple and palaces, all the remnant Jews of Jerusalem were taken to Babylon. Jerusalem was not a residential city, but a capital city and a cultic centre. So, all legitimate royal and cultic servants were eventually exiled. 2 Kings 25:18-21 reports the execution of some civil and cultic elite that were in Jerusalem in 586 BCE. The conclusion of the writer of the book of Kings is that Judah went into captivity because of the executions and deportations of 586 BCE.

Noth (1959:307) comments about the Chronicler's perception of Judah and unequivocally states, 'For him the legitimate line of Israel's history was represented by the Judeans who had been deported to Babylon, many of whom had to return to the homeland if the restoration of the temple was to be feasible.' Thiessen (2009:66) argues about the matter of legitimacy as a doctrinal matter and says that immediately after the exile, returnees were the residue of Israel.

The writer continues to say that residents in the land were regarded as foreigners despite their religious identity and faithfulness to God. Cataldo (2010:55) comments on prophetic perspective and refers to the 'Golah' people that upheld the idea that eventually they would be the "seed of life" to save the nation of Israel.

Of the people that remained it could be said that only a small 'quantity' remained, but all quality was gone or exiled. Herrmann (1981:292) argues as follows: 'Possibly Judah was put under the city of Samaria and its authorities. Most of the people who could have taken over leadership either will have left or have been deported. At the same time, any possibility of active resistance will also have been removed.' Bedford (2002:158) considers the post-exilic leaders of Judah against their exilic background and asserts that the remnant acknowledged their legitimacy in leadership.

All what was left in Judah or Jerusalem was an impotent existence of Judeans who could not make a difference at all. All legitimacy was gone either to Babylon or to other states surrounding Judah.

4.8.3 Myth tag

Some scholars declare that the notion of the desolation or emptiness of the land due to the Babylonian exile as a myth, probably because of reasoning from a literal point of view. Coogan (2006:382) says, 'The exiles seem to have created the notion of an "empty land" a land devoid of inhabitants, which some modern scholars have adopted.' Guillaume (2005:91) regards the so-called "Exile-Return" as a myth and further indicates that some deported families came back to 'colonize Judaea during the Persian period by excluding the vast majority of the inhabitants of the area from key positions in the temple and the administration.' The author emphatically postulates, 'The term "exile" should be excluded from historical literature and replaced by the more neutral "deportation"' The author (2005:92) considers the emigration to Egypt of all Judeans, even from Benjamin territory, and says that it 'is also dubious; the land was not empty.' Davies (1999:84) argues that the exile was a removal of people out of Judah and back

and thus restoration of what had been disrupted. The author continues to assert, 'In that respect the exile is the central myth of the biblical account of the past.'

Truly, from a literal, quantitative and statistical point of view neither Judah nor Jerusalem was devoid of residents. However, all that represented Judah was outside Judah and the elite had to return for anything significant to happen. The key people had gone into exile or had migrated elsewhere leaving the leadership void. The influence of infiltrators almost obliterated all signs or epitome of Yahwism. Judaism was only born in Babylon and was introduced into Judah by the returnees, who found syncretism to be rampant and at its pinnacle of existence in Judah. Literal thought on this matter of the emptiness of Judah during the exile may be theologically irrelevant and misleading.

4.9 Summary

During the time of Assyrian domination in Palestine and Syria, Judah was not unscathed. The loss of some territory prompted Judah to make an effort to exploit diplomatic ties with other states or countries. The schemes of diplomatic ties that ensued after the death of King Josiah set Judah up for disaster. After the rebellion of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, Jerusalem, including the temple, was destroyed and skilled persons and warriors were exiled as in earlier deportations. The Gedaliah governance structure, which was the spark of Judean survival as a state or a political entity, came to an end with the assassination of Gedaliah. Thus, the Judah state became an obsolete entity, probably attached to the Samaritan vassal governance structure or province. The limbo status of Judah was gradually obliterated by the infiltration of persons from neighbouring states that became mixed with the remnant by intermarriages.

Virtually, nothing is known about the lifestyle of the remnant except that syncretism became one of the normal characteristics of their religion. When eventually Babylon fell, only the religious aspect of Judean identity was permitted to be restored and not the political independence, even though Judah became a province once again—to the dislike of Samaria. The returnees, who came to rebuild the temple and the city as a whole, did not recognise the remnant Judeans. The actual remnant, though corrupted and diluted, did not resist the

reconstruction projects of the returnees, except for the Samaritans who wished to remain a province combined with the Judean territory. Fortunately, it was not a non-Jew who wrote about the desolation of Judah, and no clear objection has been clearly heard from those who remained in Judah during the exile.

4.10 Conclusion

The fall of Assyria signalled the fall of Jerusalem, which was tantamount to the fall of Judah. From Josiah to Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, it was difficult for Judah to make good decisions with regard to the precarious international affairs of the time. Ultimately, Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah, was destroyed – unlike the rest of the states in Palestine and Syria. Judah was emptied of political and cultic personnel, because of its incessant recalcitrance. The understanding of the emptiness of Judah ought to be comprehended metaphorically or figuratively and not literally. The emptiness expressed in Jewish literature was more about the interpretation of the meaning of the exile as opposed to statistical facts.

Chapter 5

The archaeological finds of the exilic and early Persian time in Judah

5.1 Introduction

The subject of the emptiness of Judah during the exilic period needs to be considered from an archaeological point of view, because the material culture of the time could assist in understanding and moderating perceptions of the matter at hand. The relative and non-absolute nature of the interpretation of archaeological discoveries does not allow that archaeological finds and their interpretations serve as conclusive considerations. Having dealt with geographical and historical issues of the exilic period in and around Judah, including some introductions of selected biblical books, archaeologically extrapolated views serve as another angle of zooming in on the matter.

5.2 Successive destructions

The territory of Judah did not suffer encroachments and destruction only under the Babylonians. Prior to the Babylonian exilic period, some preceding super powers negatively affected the land of Judah. The Judah at the time of the rise of Babylon was not the exact Judah of the united monarchy. Even though the territory of Benjamin became part of the land of Judah at the division of the monarchy, Judah proper was highly vulnerable. Up to the time that it was seized by Babylon, its borders often shifted because of foreign interference. Stern (2004:274) states, 'The Assyrians also wrought havoc in Judah and their departure brought further devastation by the Egyptian army which seized control of parts of it and left many cities in ruins.' The New Bible Dictionary (1996:98) indicates that in 701 BCE the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, advanced into Syria and conquered Sidon and also managed to seize Lachish. Eventually, the Assyrian Empire collapsed in the course of the period 612 to 609 BCE. In 609 BCE, subsequent to the death of King Josiah (see 4.2 above) and the exile of King Jehoahaz to Egypt, Judah became subject to Egypt (see 4.3.1 above).

Wiseman and Yamauchi (1980:48) write about the Assyrian annals that indicate that Judah was a vassal state during the reign of 'Manasseh', who paid tribute to Assyria of about 'two minas of silver.' The authors further list Moab, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gebal, Arvad, Ashdod and Beth-Ammon as other states or cities that paid tribute to Assyria according to the Assyrian annals. In addition, the writers highlight that it was enshrined in the annals that the vassal states had 'to take the god of Assyria as their god and threatened destruction of their cities and exiles for their citizens, should they break any of the terms.' Laughlin (2000:143) presents Jerusalem as a city that was politically independent in the south of the Levant during the Assyrian domination of the Levant. The author further recognises other sites like Lachish, Mizpah, Gibeah and Khirbet Rabud, which were existent during the Assyrian period of domination in the Levant. The Assyrians attempted to destroy Judah during the reign of Sennacherib, but divine intervention thwarted their attacks, according to 2 Kings 18:17-19:36. By attempting to defeat Jerusalem, the Assyrians had virtually invaded the territory of Judah and all that they still had to do was deposing its monarch, who was based in Jerusalem.

When the Assyrians lost power over Judah around 609 BCE, the Egyptians took advantage of the situation. According to Kitchen (1977:114), King Josiah 'was able briefly to reclaim a large measure of independence and to extend the area under his control....' However, the author points out that King Josiah himself was defeated by the Egyptians and that Jerusalem came under Egyptian sway during Josiah's regime. That implies that the rest of Judah was subjected to Egypt. The Egyptian Pharaoh became the paramount king of Judah, and thus Egyptian victories and losses became those of Judah. The heart of Judah, Jerusalem, which Assyria had been unable to conquer, easily came into the possession of Egypt in turbulent times.

The implication of the battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE was that Judah could survive or fall with Egypt. Wiseman and Yamauchi (1980:49) report about the battle thus: 'Excavations there show that there was fierce fighting within the city, which was stubbornly defended until it was ravaged by fire. Objects found there show that the Egyptian garrison included Greek mercenaries.' Finegan (1959:221) in commenting on the Babylonian text that pertains to the Carchemish battle says that Nebuchadnezzar usurped the entire land of Judah and Syria. Stern

(2009:306) reports that Babylonian records clearly indicate that the king of Judah and one of the kings of the Philistines received commodity provisions during the Babylonian exile.

Parts of the land of Judah had been tragically destroyed from the time of the Assyrian domination. Egypt succeeded Assyria for a short period in making Judah its vassal state. After the Carchemish battle, all Judah was subjected to Babylon without any exceptions.

5.3 Destruction of Jerusalem

Destruction was not a new or strange phenomenon in Judah, but the destruction of the capital city and all that it meant was a calamity yet to be experienced under the supremacy of Babylon. Wiseman and Yamauchi (1980:50-51) refer to a Babylonian chronicle that says:

‘In his [Nebuchadnezzar’s] seventh year he called up his army and marched to Palestine. He besieged the city of Judah [i.e., Jerusalem], and on the second day of the month of Adar he seized the city and captured its king. He appointed there a king of his own choice, received its heavy tribute, and sent [them] off to Babylon...’

This description of the exile resonates well with the biblical account (2 Kings 24:1-11). Wiseman and Yamauchi (1980:51) continue to comment on the ostraca that are deciphered to have been written by Hoshai and were addressed to Yaosh, the commander of the city of Lachish. The ostraca describe the status quo of the land, which was anticipating an attack by Babylonian troops in 589-587 BCE. The Babylonians were intent on punishing Zedekiah for his disloyalty to Babylon and his dependence on Egypt. Kitchen (1977:115) portrays the destruction thus:

‘Promptly, the Babylonians invaded Judah, taking cities such as Azekah and Lachish and doggedly besieging Jerusalem until its final fall in 587 BC. This time, the fall was final – the Babylonians destroyed everything, leaving Jerusalem a desolation. Archaeological finds illustrate those dark, dramatic days.’

The destruction of the capital city obviously included the destruction of other cities in Judah like Lachish, thus subjecting all Judah to Babylon, since the central governance was transferred from Jerusalem to Babylon leaving a subservient and humble structure in Mizpah.

Stern (2009:309) points out the evidence of destruction or war in Jerusalem by considering ashes, remains of a destroyed gate and arrowheads of Babylonian and Judean origin. He elaborates that these special residues of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE are a concrete affirmation of the biblical accounts (2 Kings 24:1-11, Jeremiah 39: 1-9, 2 Chronicles 36:11-21) that portray the demolition, smouldering and the fall of residences and ramparts. The author (2009:310) continues to refer to finds of the En-Gedi area and says, 'Here, too, a group of typical triangular Babylonian arrowheads was found stuck in one of the walls of a house that was destroyed and burned in 582 BCE in the course of the Babylonian campaign in Transjordan.' The archaeological finds regarding the destruction of Judah by Babylonians are not only found in the area of Judah, but in other areas also. Probably, those other areas were inhabited by persons that could pose a threat to Babylon, especially city dwellers. Frank (1971:217) refers to Jeremiah, who reports that Nebuzaradan spared poor persons in Judah that had no material possessions and that he granted them vineyards and fields. Truly, the poor that prior to the exile were at a disadvantage would have been appreciative of the exilic era, which advantaged them with some property in which they would not work for masters or employers. These poor people must have wished that the exile would last long or forever, since its end would return them to their former economic state. These poor people would obviously have supported Babylon fully and posed no threat to it. Jeremiah 40 and 41 indicate that the poor people supported Gedaliah, who was stationed as their governor in Mizpah, and that they even wanted to protect Gedaliah from the conspiracy of Ishmael.

The destruction of Jerusalem is not a cause of disagreement, but the issue is how long the aftermath of the destruction actually lasted and whether the literal devastation of the city meant there were no residents left in the land of Judah. All interested Bible students clearly know from the Bible itself that the poor people remained. Finkelstein (2008:503) argues that prior to the reconstruction of the fortification wall of Jerusalem, the place or area of Jerusalem gives no evidence of an attempt of or actual reconstruction. This argument is based on studies of housing plans of the period between the exilic era and the Persian era. The writer goes on to say, 'The agreement of the Persians to build fortifications in Jerusalem and to alter the status of the city to the capital of the province was the most dramatic change in the history of the city

after the Babylonian destruction in 586.' Thompson (1973:155) elaborates that at the time of the exile of residents of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, a historical era ended for Israel. This historical era of being virtually non-existent prevailed for the duration of the Babylonian hegemony. It only ended with the Persian regime after the demise of the Babylonian Empire.

5.4 More traces of destruction

Jerusalem was clearly destroyed, according to historical and archaeological facts, but some traces of destruction throughout Judah need to be considered to determine the impact of the exile on Judah as a whole. Barstad (1996:47-48) acknowledges the traces of destruction as discovered in sites like Jerusalem, Tell Beit Mirsim, Beth-Shemesh, Lachish and Ramat Rachel. The author continues to argue that residences in the north of Judah and Benjamin were not adversely affected by the experience. Several cities lying north of Jerusalem, in the traditional area of Benjamin, were not adversely impinged on at all. The fact that the territory of Benjamin was virtually unaffected by the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and other parts of Judah seems to underscore the assertion that Judah was not emptied of Judeans in the process of its seizure and the exile of some citizens of Judah. Of course, Benjamin may be excluded from the areas that were destroyed with the understanding that rebellion against Babylon did not strongly emanate from it. Babylon dealt with the heart of the rebellion and emptied Judah of political and cultic leadership that were closely related in Judah.

Schoville (1978:424) and Fritz (1994:178) consider traces of destruction in Lachish. According to Schoville, the destruction of Lachish by Nebuchadnezzar in 598 BCE is manifested by 'a violent conflagration and the collapse of the palace.' Ussishkin (1993:910) indicates that Lachish was vacant for some time after its destruction, and some returnees found space to occupy after the exile. Fritz (1994:178) indicates that in 1935, a British excavating team discovered 18 letters dated at about the time of Nebuchadnezzar's attack against Judah in 587 BCE. Gibson (1971:32) identifies the team as Wellcome Archaeology Research Expedition and he (1971:34) dates the letters to 589 BCE or early in 588 BCE. Furthermore, Gibson (1971:34) explains that peripheral cities were destroyed first, before the capital city, Jerusalem. These letters are said to have been sent to Yaosh who was 'a high official in Lachish', according to Fritz (1994:178).

Furthermore, Fritz (1994:32) and Gibson (1971:35) concur that the letters have overtones of addressing an emergency or of being written during a state of emergency.

Gibson (1971:36-46) outlines six Lachish letters. The first letter (1971:36-37) mentions five names that seem to be names of officials of the king of the time, Zedekiah. Only two names are biblically known, which are Mattaniah, son of Neriah (Zedekiah), and that of Jaazaniah, who was an army official during Zedekiah's reign. The three unknown names simply remind Bible students that the Bible is not a clear-cut history source. In the second letter (1971:37-38), Hoshaiiah anticipating to receive a response with the much needed intervention of Yahweh addresses Jehoiakim. The tone of this letter seems to be more of a prayer for divine intervention. The third letter (1971:38-41) indicates that there has been a misunderstanding between the king (Jehoiakim) and Hoshaiiah. Furthermore, there seems to be a diplomatic errand that Jehoiachin has to attend to in Egypt. In the fourth letter (1971:41-43), Hoshaiiah writes to Jehoiakim about a few instructions he received and has already completed, while he is still executing other instructions. The writer of the letter reports that they are not seeing Azekah, probably due to weather challenges. The author (Gibson) perceives that Hoshaiiah is asking the king to find out whether Azekah is still safe or not. Stern (1993:124) says that Azekah could have been destroyed in 588 BCE before the destruction of Babylon. The fifth letter, according to Gibson (1971:43-45), is difficult to interpret since it is about a conspiracy of which the king is alerted. In the sixth letter (1971:45-46), Hoshaiiah seems to be exhorting some persons in Jerusalem because of their conduct towards the king. All six letters were truly written in a context of warfare. There is scholarly agreement that Lachish was adversely affected by the destruction wrought by Babylonians.

Schoville (1978:326) comments on Tell Beit Mirsim, which was excavated. From these excavations, a decline in domestic house construction around 600 BCE is deduced. The author further reports that some jar handles are found stamped with the seal of Eliakim, a steward of Jehoiachin, who took care of the king's property at the exile of the king. According to the writer, this site is reckoned among the sites that were destroyed in 587 BCE. Greenberg (1993:180) concludes that the seal impressions on jar handles attest to the destruction wrought by the

force of Babylonians from 589 BCE to 587 BCE. Wiseman and Yamauchi (1980:55) comment on the aftermath of the destruction of Judah state saying, 'The return of the Jews to Judah can be seen in the sparse traces of resettlement found at Gezer, Lachish, Bethel, Beth-zur ... and Tell el-Farah.' Dever (1993:505 -506) points out the Gate of Gezer, which had been increased in size, was destroyed shortly thereafter by the Babylonians around 587-586 BCE. The author (1993:506) deciphers a void of evidence after the destruction until the Persian era. Still after the exile, traces of the destruction of some places in Judah are obvious. The notion of a normal life that continued in Judah as a whole is thus dispelled by clear evidences of under-recovery in some sites that were destroyed.

5.5 State of Judah

The condition of Judah was largely dependent on the philosophy and policies of Babylon regarding the treatment of its vassal states. Stern (2009:303) succinctly states:

'Unlike the previous Assyrian imperial system, which strived to create a network of semi-independent provinces, the Babylonian concept was quite different: their entire focus was on the welfare of the city of Babylon and its immediate surroundings, while the periphery was largely neglected, with negative consequences for those living in those territories.'

The plight of the remnant in Judah was dire, because Babylon was adamant, there should be no indication of a recovery that could pose a threat to its supremacy.

5.5.1 Extent of destruction

The measure of Judah's destruction was such that conditions would never have allowed normal continuity of life. Lipschits (2004b:102) opines that the overall population reduction in Judah was 70%. Of course, the unfortunate rebellions of Judah against Babylon precipitated a harsh reaction on the part of the Babylonians.

Frank (1971:214) explains that after the defeat of the Egyptian forces, the Babylonians 'returned to strangle Jerusalem and to destroy Judah.' The writer further elucidates that Jerusalem was in an even more wretched state and that the intruders scattered over Judah,

looting, devastating, executing and leaving some fortresses in ashes. According to Wiseman and Yamauchi (1980:52), 'The end of Judah as a state is marked by the large number of towns destroyed at this time and never occupied again: Lachish, Azekah, Tell Beit Mirsim, Beth Shemesh (II), and Ramat Rachel.' Lipschits (2004a:44) says that during the entire Babylonian Empire the city of Jerusalem was forsaken and 'it was resettled during the Persian regime.' Cahill (2007:97-98) asserts that newer vessels in Jerusalem only surfaced during the Hellenistic period. Valkama (2010:57) indicates that one of the things that manifest a collapse of a society is a population decrease, which is evident from the archaeological finds in the territory of Judah. The author (2010:58) further posits, 'It is typical to post-collapse societies that archaeological finds at settlements are few, but in graves they are many'

Thompson (1973:180-181) agrees that the reoccupation pattern of destroyed sites portrays the severity of the destruction and the fluidity of continued settlement, since various towns were demolished early in the sixth century BCE and were not reoccupied, while other towns were partially inhabited afterwards, and yet other towns were re-inhabited after a long time of desolation. The author also emphasises that no town of Judah proper had dwellers at all times. Stern (2009:324) supports this view by pointing out that Jericho and En-Gedi did not survive the destruction by the Babylonians and only recovered with the advent of the Persian regime. Blenkinsopp (2002:184) dares to stand opposed to Stern's earlier publication with the same notion by indicating that material finds are not conclusive that Jericho was destroyed, and in the case of En-Gedi, the timing seems to have been drawn from biblical data and not material discoveries in the area. However, Stern (2009:325) mentions the fortresses of Khirbet Abu Tuwein, Beth-Shemesh and Tell Rabud south of Hebron as sites that survived the destruction. In another source, Zvi Lederman (1993:251) posits, 'The final destruction of Beth-Shemesh was related to the conquest of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE.' The effect of the destruction of Jerusalem and other parts of Judah cannot be underestimated at all, since it was felt in the entire land of Judah. The bottom line is that Judah could not significantly recover from the consequences of the destruction of Jerusalem and some sites in Judah until the time of the Persian regime. Nevertheless, Judah was not literally emptied of residents, but the import of

the calibre of persons exiled and executed in the process of its subjugation is critical in comprehending the Jewish literature that gives an account of the exile.

5.5.2 Vulnerability

The nations surrounding Judah posed a threat to the land of the fallen kingdom of Judah. Lipschits (2004b:99) in presenting the severity of Babylon's destruction of the Judean population in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas in 587 BCE to 586 BCE says that 'the region was almost completely emptied of its population.' Because of the extensive population reduction, the land and the remaining people became vulnerable. Among the nations that took advantage of the situation was Edom. Blenkinsopp (2002:186) indicates that even prior to the 586 BCE destruction, the region south of Jerusalem was subject to Edomite penetration.

Stern (2004:273) in summarising the results of the excavated layers of Jerusalem, Lachish, En-Gedi, Arad and other sites says, 'The results of all these excavations and surveys clearly affirm that Judah was almost entirely destroyed and that its Jewish population disappeared from most of the kingdom's territory (except, perhaps, for the area of Benjamin).' Mazar (1993:402) refers to the destruction of En-Gedi, which probably occurred in the 23rd year of King Nebuchadnezzar (582-581 BCE). The writer further explains that an aspect of the aftermath was that most of the territory of the defeated kingdom of Judah was taken by the Edomites and incorporated into the so-called 'Idumea'. Fritz (1994:179) comments about ostraca and letters discovered in Arad, and posits, 'One letter orders troops to be sent from Arad and Qinah to Ramat-Negeb to defend the city against the Edomites and so attests the infiltration of Edomites into southern Judah at the beginning of the sixth century.' Stavrakopoulou and Barton (2010:98) report about vessels and cooking pots of Edomite origin found on Tel Malhata. The writers further argue that Edomites could have either travelled through the area to Gaza and back or dominated the area after the demise of the kingdom of Judah. The writers regard the issue of the control of the area by Edomites as a matter of debate. After the Babylonian destruction, what may be called the 'Edomite destruction' occurred. The result was not only dilapidation, but the territory of Judah shrank as Edomites took advantage of the weakness of Judah, especially when it had no civil structure after Gedaliah's murder.

5.5.3 Condition

The condition of the land of Judah at the end of the Babylonian hegemony tells a story that affirms the conceptual notion of the emptiness of Judah. Stern (2009:308-309) remarks about scanty archaeological evidence about Babylon and concludes:

‘Subsequently, the most prominent feature left by seventy years of Babylonian domination in Palestine was the total destruction and devastation of all the main cities that had flourished during the Assyrian period, even those fortresses established by the Assyrian authorities themselves.’

The author expands further on the condition of Judah with reference to a study of the outcomes of all the archaeological excavations carried out in Palestine, excluding the regions of Phoenicia, Benjamin and Transjordan, which show that all cities remained demolished until the end of the Babylonian time. Valkama (2010:39) accounts that some archaeological reports portray ‘a poor subsistence level society in Judah during the mid- and late-sixth century BCE.’ Thompson (1973:182) states that ‘when the Jews returned from their exile they returned to a land that had little in the way of towns, houses, or farms awaiting them.’

The condition of some cities of Judah at the end of the Babylonian kingdom clearly does not indicate a continued occupation of such cities. Stern (2009:324) attempts to answer the question as to whether Jerusalem had residents during the exile and states:

‘A more definite answer emerges at sites excavated in the extensive Judean territory east and south of Jerusalem: here, all excavations attest to a complete destruction and gap in the history of the vast majority of the settlements. This gap lasted from the end of the Judean monarchy until the Persian period.’

There was no significant recovery or reconstruction of the destroyed cities of Judah during the exile. The paucity of information about developments in Judah during the exile indicates that the condition of the land and the nation of Judah were left miserable, and dispels the notion of a continued significant occupation of Judah proper.

5.6 Territory of Benjamin spared

The issue of the total destruction of Judah is negated by the fact of the survival of the Benjamin territory through the exile. Lipschits (2004a:44) regards the territory of Benjamin to have been largely rural. The author adds that it actually developed during the exilic period together with the surroundings of Bethlehem, Tekoa and Beth-Zur. Furthermore, the writer believes that various rural communities and farms with wine presses and agricultural equipment emerged around Mizpah and Gibeon. Lipschits (2004a:44-45) emphasises that rural dwellings in Judah and the Benjamin territories were valued by Babylon as a source of wine, olive oil and other agricultural produce. Lipschits (2004a:46) explains that the production of wine and oil in Judah during the exile was meant for paying tribute and providing for the needs of Babylonian personnel deployed in Judah.

The Benjamin territory was not entirely rural. Thompson (1973:182) says, 'North of Jerusalem we have evidence, based on excavations, that towns were occupied there throughout the sixth century.' Lipschits (2004b:104) mentions Mizpah, Gibeah, Bethel and Gibeon as towns that survived and prospered during the Babylonian era. Mazar (2009:548) reports that the extensive devastation wrought by the Babylonian attack were noticed in various places in Philistia and in Judah, but there is proof of perpetual residence in some places in Judah, especially to the north of Jerusalem. Stern (2009:321) also attests that the excavated sites of the territory of Benjamin indicate that there was no destruction in Benjamin and life continued through the period of Babylonian dominion.

It is interesting that the territory of Benjamin, which was part of Judah, served an important purpose for the survivors of the destroyed kingdom of Judah. Stern (2009:322) explains that all archaeological finds in the area of Benjamin give the impression that even if some sites were affected during the Babylonian destruction, such a site 'was quickly reconstructed, probably becoming a haven for some of the refugees from other parts of Judah.' Barstad (1996:48) reports that though studies of Tell el-Ful point to signs of the destruction of the fortress, the residential area continued to be inhabited throughout the time of the exile. The author extrapolates that some citizens of Judah could have moved there until the end of the exile

period. Even though the Benjamin territory was part of Judah during the time of the divided kingdoms, at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon, the Benjaminites submitted to Babylon, while the Judah proper elite rebelled from time to time.

The battle was more about governance than land or citizenship. The fact of the survival of Benjamin does not necessarily negate the concept of total destruction in Judah, but actually leads to comprehending the concept of the emptiness of Judah as not being truly literal, but conceptual. Almost no relevant literature ignores the survival of Benjamin cities. Therefore, the perception of Judean proper writers of Benjaminites must be in view of perceptions of the time. By submitting to Babylon, the people of the Benjamin territory could have implicitly cut the bond with Judah proper or they could have been perceived to be cutting the bond with Judah proper for dear life instead of cherishing pride of identity. According to Jeremiah 37:11-13, when Jeremiah was to claim his property in Anathoth in the Benjamin territory, he was perceived to be defecting to Babylon and thus arrested at the gate of Benjamin. It could be that the Benjamin territory was perceived to have defected to Babylon by submitting to it. Lipschits (2004a:45) in commenting about continuous production of pottery in Benjamin and Ammon asserts, 'It might also be emphasised that the basic political organisation and the unit of subsistence in both areas was probably the tribe, not the state' Judah proper was on its own in resisting Babylon and in the experience of the exile. Benjamin never resisted Babylon either as a tribe or in solidarity with Judah proper, so that even Bible writers that used the word 'Judah' could have implicitly excluded Benjamin territory.

5.7 Continuity through the exile

Some scholars propound the idea that there was some continuity during the period of the exile throughout the land of Judah. Lipschits (2004a:45) claims that local pottery was produced between the end of the seventh and the mid-fifth centuries BCE. However, Valkama (2010:39) explains that some archaeological studies indicate that there was a gap in the history of Judah during the sixth century BCE, while other studies show that life continued to some extent during the sixth century BCE as it had before. Neither Bible writers nor believers actually say

that Judah was devoid of human beings. Nevertheless, such arguments should not be shunned, lest an appearance of subjectivity is established.

5.7.1 Continuity in Jerusalem

The very city, which is documented to have been destroyed and which is lamented, is regarded by others to have survived the Babylonian invasion and to have managed some continuity. Valkama (2010:50) acknowledges that in view of the rubble in Jerusalem in the mid-sixth century BCE, the destruction must have been tremendous. Lipschits (2004b:102) estimates that the population reduction in Jerusalem was up to 90 %. The author (2010:51), despite the general vagueness regarding the settlement of Jerusalem during the exile, argues that there is a report that a small area in Jerusalem was occupied by dwellers in the mid-sixth century BCE. Barstad (1996:54) bases his arguments on the discovery of a burial site in Hinnom Valley thus: 'Apparently, these caves continued to be in use even after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Thus, we have here for the first time evidence in support of the continuation of settlement in the city of Jerusalem itself during the "exile" period.' Valkama (2010:51) also refers to mid-sixth century graves in Jerusalem and states, 'Mid-sixth century pottery was uncovered in the repository of burial Chamber 25 in tomb 24.' If peasants were indeed not worthy of burial in graves of the time, the evidence of burials in mid-sixth century BCE may be signifying that there were truly inhabitants in Jerusalem at that time.

Schoville (1978:401) asserts that 'the city has been occupied continuously throughout its long history.' However, the writer (1978:402) admits that the city lay in ruins during the exile but never lost its significance. Wiseman and Yamauchi (1980:52) explain that some jar handles and containers used for tax purposes bear the inscription 'Judah' (*yhd*) or sometimes 'Jerusalem' and some have individual names written on them. Such finds probably indicate that there was continued residence in Jerusalem and that the residents had been productive. On the other hand, if that had been the case, Mizpah would not have been chosen as a governance city in Judah during Gedaliah's time. Another possibility is that such developments occurred after the Mizpah governance had been brought to nought. Such finds say almost nothing about the

governance or kingdom of Judah, since Judah's governance was left in limbo or reckoned with the Samaria province.

The graves were not only for the elite, for even the poor people had to be buried. Thus, the existence of a gravesite does not dispute the conceptual emptiness of Judah. The issue of the significance of Jerusalem could have been a matter of belief rather than a pragmatic matter. Jerusalem was not the capital city of Judah during the exile and almost no one would wish either to be a leader to support or to resist Babylon with the support of the very few residents of the time. Thus, the emptiness of Judah relates well to the unifying function of the city of Jerusalem in Judah, which was situated closer to the Benjamin territory.

5.7.2 Continuity in Mizpah

The city of Mizpah was in the Benjamin area, which largely survived the Babylonian invasion of Judah. Barstad (1996:48-49) points out that there had been continuity in the settlement of Mizpah. The writer (1996) states, 'The Babylonians set up some kind of administrative centre at Mizpah, something, of course, they would have never done if there had been no population left in the country.' In the opinion of Valkama (2010:44), part of Mizpah was destroyed and rebuilt during the Neo-Babylonian regime; the other part was not destroyed and settlement in the city continued. Furthermore, the writer (2010:46) claims that about four to five hundred residents dwelt in Mizpah during the mid-sixth century BCE and that the city was the centre of Judah during the Babylonian hegemony. The significance of Mizpah as a governance centre was of a short duration. Unwittingly, Judah and Samaria were reunited under the Samaria province until the Persian regime influenced by exiles recognised Judah as an independent entity. The settlement of people in Mizpah through the exile period is not disputed, but its short-lived governance does not refute the emptiness of Judah.

5.7.3 Continuity in other areas

Stern (2004:276) argues that in 'central Samaria, the land of Benjamin and Rabat Ammon and its surroundings ... some degree of cultural continuity can be distinguished.' With reference to the Benjamin area and the northern Judean hills, Lipschits (2004:102) is convinced that 'there is

a clear continuity.’ Valkama (2010:46-47) highlights that destruction traces of the Neo-Babylonian attacks are evident, according to an archaeological study done on Gibeah (Tell el-Ful) in 1964 and published in 1981; however, the author maintains that settlement continued in other areas of the site during the mid-sixth century BCE. The writer further refers to some pottery remains that show that settlement occurred in the mid-sixth century BCE. Barstad (1996:49) refers to the finds of six ‘inscribed handles from Gibeon.’ The author further argues that even though En-Gedi was destroyed by Babylon, there were residents in the area during the exile.

Valkama (2010:47-50) refers to the studies done on Bethel (Beitin) and Gibeon (El-Jib) to further the argument of some vague continuity in Judah. The author (2010:49-50) elucidates that several studies were done from 1934 to 1960 on the Bethel site, and the latest publication appeared in 1968. The writer concludes that the reports about the site are not conclusive, but rather speculative, just as other vague reports on the mid-sixth century BCE studies have been. The author further perceives the reconstruction of the site to have occurred during the Persian time. However, Kelso (1993:194) asserts that Bethel prevailed until the end of the Babylonian Empire, since it was not destroyed with Jerusalem in 587 BCE. Regarding studies on Gibeon, Valkama (2010:47-48) expounds that they were done from 1950 to 1960 and show a huge settlement around 700 BCE, which disappeared around the sixth century BCE. The writer (2010:48) refers to pottery finds that are controvertible when it comes to dating them. This demonstrates that the issues of settlement are not denied, but that the destruction of Judah cities by Babylon is undeniable. In total, Valkama (2010:43) mentions thirteen sites, which indicate continuity of settlement around the exilic period. Three of these sites are gravesites. In general, Valkama (2010:44) indicates that the continuity of settlement in Judah was more rural in nature and that the finds are not comprehensive, probably because of erosion, destruction or clearing in preparation for post-exilic building works. Lipschits (2004b:100) explains that the central area around the destroyed capital city of Judah became less populated and the peripheral areas had normal settlements. Most of the areas that clearly portray continuity of settlement were rural. Lipschits (2004b:103) extrapolates that the similarities of rural

settlements in Judah during the Babylonian and Persian epochs attest to the fact that there was continuity throughout the Babylonian era.

Truly, there were residents almost throughout Judah during the exile, but they could not develop and execute restorative initiatives in their land. Such a lack of potential to rebuild their land indirectly demonstrates that the deportation or execution of the elite left a glaring leadership void in Judah, which is linked to the emptiness of Judah.

5.8 Emptiness perceptions

Mazar (2009:549) and Stern (2009:308) emphasise the fact that there is not much known about the Babylonian period from an archaeological point of view. However, Stern (2009:309) refers to a tomb that could be dated back to the Babylonian period, but indicates that it contained finds of the Persian period. The writer continues to say, 'Even with great effort, no more than one or two types of clay vessels can be found that may be safely attributed to this period alone.' The paucity of information about developments in Judah during the Babylonian era deduced from the material culture of the time may indicate that Judah was either indeed emptied or Judah became an agricultural land without any material production and construction.

Stern (2004:273) faces the debate of the emptiness of Judah during the exile and considers the outcomes of archaeological excavation and explorations throughout Judah. The writer emphasises that the notion of a complete destruction of Judah by Babylon is affirmed by proper archaeological studies and not beliefs of schools of thought. Furthermore, Stern (2004:274) seeks to convey the meaning of the emptiness of Judah during the exile thus:

'The land was not "emptied" but its great harbour cities in the north and south were totally destroyed, and the population, some of which was killed and some deported by the Babylonians, was sharply reduced. By the term "empty" – as I maintain in all my writings – I refer to a land that was virtually depopulated.'

Lipschits (2004b:105) argues that the proponents of the 'empty land' and the 'Babylonian gap' perceptions do not imagine that Judah was really unoccupied land, as even the Bible does not

say the land was devoid of residents. The author (2004:105) hits the nail on the head when he poignantly states that 'the kingdom ceased to exist.'

There is no argument about the depopulation of the land of Judah proper, excluding the Benjamin territory, but the importance of the deported elite is the main issue. Archaeological studies indicate that there was almost no making or purchasing of any material or property. Probably, such a lack of material culture was caused by the fact that there was no leadership in the land. However, Blenkinsopp (2002:180-181) explains by saying that 'most people did not live in towns, and many will not have left their signature on the archaeological record.' Pottery production seems to have ceased at this time and Judah proper was reduced to a mere agricultural land with the deportation of civil and cultic elite.

5.9 Summary

The destruction of parts of the land of Judah occurred during the Assyrian domination when the land still had its legitimate monarchy. The Egyptians only made Judah its vassal state without much destruction, but the Babylonians destroyed various cities in Judah, including the capital city, Jerusalem, and carried out the emptying of the land by deporting its elite and clergy. The state of Judah proper during the exile was miserable with its inability to reconstruct properties of significance that had been destroyed such as the temple and palaces. On the other hand, the Edomites wreaked havoc by further reducing the size of Judah proper when they claimed the vulnerable and defenceless southern Judah for themselves. The survival of Benjamin territory did not mean that Judah survived, but to some rebellious elite and eventually to the returnees after the exile, its submission to Babylon meant that it had become part of Babylon. The element of continuity, with reference to graves and other minor traces of continuity, is inadequate to address the issue in hand, since the remnant was incapacitated to sustain their identity as a state or even the province of Judah. The perception of the emptiness of Judah is neither negated nor necessarily confirmed by archaeology, but it remains an issue bearing down on what remained of Judah after its destruction by Babylon.

5.10 Conclusion

Even though archaeology does not stand to refute or approve history, it stands to support or balance history and to fill the gaps that the historical discourse may have. Archaeological finds support the fact that there were no significant developments in the land of Judah proper during the exile. The land was left with agriculturally oriented peasants, who had been stripped of civil and cultic leadership. That was the void in Judah.

Chapter 6

Theological perspectives on the emptiness of exilic and early post-exilic Yehud

6.1 Introduction

After considering geographical matters, the introductions to some biblical books, historical perspectives and archaeological evidence, the final aspect to consider is the theological perspective on the emptiness of exilic and early post-exilic Judah. It has been established that Judah was not literally empty during the exile and that the returnees did not find a completely desolate land. The Bible writers that indicate that Judah was exiled have been found somewhat wanting in their geographical, historical and probably archaeological rectitude. However, it is yet to be established whether their theological aptitude is questionable or not. Linville (2010b:275) points out that the concept of the exile period as a theological construct is not necessarily a concession that there had been indeed an exile of Judah as a whole nation, but it is meant to draw a line of demarcation between the vast body of literature on writings contained in the Bible. In this chapter, the selected biblical texts will be thoroughly discussed as a springboard to delve deeper into theological debates regarding the exile and its impact on the Judeans. The selected passages, Lamentations 1:1-4 and 2 Chronicles 36:15-21, relate theologically to Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. While the selected texts refer to the exile as a tragedy in the present and the past, the passages in Leviticus and Deuteronomy present the exile as a possibility in the event of disobedience and unfaithfulness of Israel. These thematically related passages will be considered as understood by various scholars and then a theological position will be assumed to determine whether the concept of the exile is purely a historical matter or not. The concept of the exile will be considered from a theological perspective that is not oblivious to historical details about the exile. The whole idea of this chapter is to unravel the exile concept theologically.

6.2 Literary structure

Two passages have been selected in this research to address the issue of the emptiness of *Yehud* during and immediately after the exile. They are Lamentations 1:1-4 and 2 Chronicles 36:15-21. The book of Lamentations is an exilic source produced by members of the remnant, while Chronicles is a post-exilic source written by Levitical and priestly circles for theological purposes. The two selected passages, from different contexts, say explicitly that Judah went into exile. If two sources of different dates and authorship express the same concept, it might mean that the said expression existed either before anyone of the writers actually wrote it down, or the said expression is not a construct of anyone of them. The preferred position in this research is that God first expressed the concept of the exile before the exile of Judah and the exile of the northern kingdom of Israel. The Torah (specifically Leviticus and Deuteronomy) and the prophetic book of Jeremiah, when properly perused, assist the researcher in understanding the exile concept as God revealed it long before the exile and just before it actually occurred. Since the book of Lamentations consists of poetic literature, the concept of the exile of Judah is technically revoked from a historical sphere and transmitted to a realm that would relatively accommodate both history (what transpired) and poetry (expressions in an experience), which point to theology. Detailed introductory studies of the book of Lamentations are featured in the third chapter of this research (see 3.4 above). Smith (1989:21), when referring to 2 Chronicles 36, states that the writer (of Chronicles) seems to be summarizing the exile event and then mentions Cyrus, King of Persia. Suffice it to say the book of Chronicles may not be regarded as an absolute historical source when it summarises the history of the exile. Theology writing was the thrust of the authors of the book of Chronicles. Some Bible students glean theology from the book of Chronicles, while others learn history from the book. Detailed discussions of the book of Chronicles are covered in the third chapter of this thesis (see 3.2 above).

In this chapter, the theology of the Bible writers of selected books will be considered. In dealing with the theology of the books, the structure of the selected texts is of critical importance.

Webster (2009:264) succinctly states the following: ‘Do not think in terms of Bible verses but rather in terms of clauses. A verse may have several clauses. It is useful to print the text one clause at a time in order to display a sequence of clauses.’ Arnold and Choi (2003:162) explain that phrases may be words that relate to a particular word, and beyond phrases are clauses and sentences. Furthermore, the writers define a clause as ‘a group of words containing a subject and only one predicate.’ Webster (2009:270) says, ‘More than just labelling clauses, we want to know how the clausal structure contributes to the story.’ The clausal study of the selected texts will be scrutinised in context in order to obtain a proper theological perspective on the passages. Thus, the concept of the exile of Judah will be comprehended as the Bible writers intended it.

The sources of the Hebrew Bible text that will be used are Schenker (1997) and Green (1986), who present similar texts or words in the selected texts. Green’s (1986) literal translation into English is will be used as an English Bible version.

6.3 Lamentations 1:1-4

The book of Lamentations is poetic work of the exilic. Kaiser (1994: 88) in commenting about interpreting Old Testament poetry states, ‘Part of the problem exists within the discipline of Bible interpretation itself, for some of the most important decisions about how we are to treat poetry still have not been successfully resolved by the scholars of this form. This means that we often must take a much more tentative attitude in interpreting biblical poetry.’ Furthermore, Kaiser (1994:98) acknowledges the aptitude of poetry to paint a detailed and clearer picture for readers as opposed to prose that cannot be equally vivid about events and experiences.

The breakdown into clauses of the stated passage is deciphered as follows:

1. איכה יושבה בדד העיר (Main clause)
 {How sits alone the city}
 רבתי עם (Temporal clause)
 {Once full of people}
 היתה כאלמנה (Main clause)

{She has become like a widow}

רבתי בגוים (Temporal clause)

{Once great among the nations}

שרתי במדינות היתה למס: (Main clause)

{A noble woman among the provinces has become a tribute payer}

One of the main clauses of the discourse is found in the first verse and it says that, amazingly, the city, most probably Jerusalem, remains alone. Renkema (1998:94-95) describes the poem as a dirge due to the use of the word 'how' at its very beginning. Both Renkema (1998:95) and Salters (2010:36) indicate that the 'sitting (*down*)' is reminiscent of the mourners who would sit down as they mourn. Salters (2010:36) explains that 'sitting down alone' could mean that the city is without inhabitants. However, he goes on to argue that this expression is an exaggeration, since there is also mention of mourning priests and maidens. This clause refers to the miserable mourning remnant and not necessarily to the appearance of the destroyed city of Jerusalem, according to Renkema (1998:95). The city was utterly stripped of its pride and prestige of being the big and busy capital city. It has to be remembered, the city was not meant to be a residential place only, but it was primarily the royal and cultic centre of Judah. Having lost its status it appears to be alone in a mourning state.

Parry (2010:43) says that the poet exclaims at the city that had once been large, but then reduced to 'nothing.' The change of status from prestigious to debasing is also acknowledged by Berlin (2004:49). The people who had filled the city were not just residents, but dignitaries or elites and visitors in need of royal and cultic services. The poet, who seems to be one of the mourners, presents the abundance of residents in the city as something of the past – as history.

The poet presents the latter state of the city as that of a widow. Clines (2003:618) portrays the state of being a widow saying that she is 'now bereft of her husband, which is to say, her people, and vulnerable like any woman in a patriarchal society deprived of male protection.' Parry (2010:43) identifies the former husband of the widow as the LORD, whose abandonment of her is like a dead husband. However, Nichol ed. (1976c:546) simply says that 'the Lord is no longer her husband ... "for a small moment."' Renkema (1998:98) finds the cause for the

abandonment to be the infidelity of the woman. However, Salters (2010:36) concludes that being a widow in this case, means the 'loss of the ten tribes', and further says that as a widow she cannot have children again. The theology of the relationship between God and his people depicted as that of husband and wife may not be compatible with God's relationship with the remnant in Jerusalem. The reason is that God was with the exiles, whose fate was not as bleak as that of the remnant, who were regarded as bad figs, according to Jeremiah 24. This analogy will be explained later (see 6.9.4. below)). Furthermore, the poet clearly says that the city has become 'like or as a widow' and not 'she has become a widow'. The actual thrust of the phrase is more about the intensity of the miserable state of Jerusalem during the exile. The depth of her agony may be compared to that of a widow.

The city had been great among the nations, but according to Renkema (1998:97), 'Jerusalem no longer functions as capital and Temple City of Judah.' Hillers (1972:6) explains that the poet is not only referring to Jerusalem, but that he is considerate of the whole state of Judah. Indeed, Jerusalem, like other capital cities, represented the state, in this case Judah; thus, its demise is tantamount to the demise of the state of Judah.

Renkema (1998:100) indicates that during the days of King David and King Solomon, the city was governing provinces. Furthermore, the venture of Josiah to extend the kingdom of Judah is implicitly considered. Of course, after the death of King Josiah, Jerusalem began to pay tribute to Egypt, and the city became severely depopulated after the destruction of 587 BCE. The word 'provinces' manifests the thought paradigm at the time of the exile, when states were relegated to province status. Salters (2010:38) says that after 586 BCE, Jerusalem or Judah could have been the best of all provinces. The poet defines Judah as a noble woman in comparison with other provinces. This metaphorical presentation of Judah concerns Judah's status before 586 BCE. After 586 BCE, according to Salters (2010:38), Judah moved from a prestigious position in the Promised Land to a situation where forced labour was rampant. The demands of Babylon in terms of olive oil and wine production were to be met first. Time to produce anything for themselves was limited, if any. The Egyptian slavery experience had come into Jerusalem and all freedom was lost.

2. בכו תבכה בלילה (Main clause)
{Bitterly she weeps in the night}
 ודמעתה על לחיה (Main clause)
{And her tears are on her cheeks}
 אינ־לָהּ מנחם מכל־אהביה (Main clause)
{To her there is no comforter out of all her lovers}
 כל־רעיה בגדו בה: (Main clause)
{All her friends dealt in deceit with her}
 היו לָהּ לא־יֹבִיִּם: (Main clause)
{They became to her haters}

The second verse delves into the weeping state of the city at night. Renkema (1998:101) and Parry (2010:45) emphasise that the widow weeps even at night instead of resting in sleep, since her mourning is unceasing. Berlin (2004:50) posits, 'She sobs "at night" the saddest time of day, when one is alone and can vent one's feeling' Salters (2010:39) points out that night is the time when a widow is truly alone. In this case, the widow weeps with none to console her and she cannot sleep as expected in normal circumstances. However, Renkema (1998:101) deems night time as God's executive judgement. The weeping in the night is not a literal expression, but a metaphorical portrayal of the condition of the city. The weeping does not seem to take place over one night or every night as to substantiate the concept of a literal night experience. The place and atmosphere of weeping is exclusive and private and does not invite sympathisers. The citizens of Judah best knew what was lost in Jerusalem, because of the destruction of the city in 586 BCE. Therefore, no one can join in the mourning expressed here, except the one who knows what is lost. The weeping in the night is more domestic in nature and not international.

According to Salters (2010:39), the expression that her tears are on her cheeks means on-going weeping. The cheeks here are also not literally meant, but figuratively. It appears that no one cares to wipe away her tears. The aftermath of the exile was lament, which was characteristic of the content of the cultic expression and experience in Jerusalem. The LORD who was supreme over the royal and cultic spheres had turned His back on the city. Helpless lament is the disposition of the woman.

The weeping is exacerbated by the fact that none of her former lovers or allies is there to console her. Salters (2010:40) refers to these lovers as the 'surrounding nations on whom Jerusalem had relied when Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon.' Fernandez (1998:1039) stresses that the mourning is intensified by the unavailability of countries like Egypt, who was reasonably expected to alleviate the torture. None of those lovers seemed to care about the status quo in Judah or Jerusalem. Not even one of them sympathised by expressing a word of comfort or support.

Furthermore, it became clear that the friends of Jerusalem that had influenced her to revolt against Babylon had all deceived her. Joyce (2001:530) regards the deceitful friends as 'false political allies.' Had it not been for the promises of those lovers, Jerusalem would have been spared and not destroyed, although it would have remained a vassal state subject to Babylon. The fact that the friends were not there after the fall of Jerusalem, when they were needed most, meant that they were deceptive and dishonest to Jerusalem.

The poet portrays those who had become traitors as deceitful lovers. Huey (1993:451) identifies Egypt as an unreliable friend of Jerusalem and indicates that Edom actually looted the city together with Babylon. Fernandez (1998:1039) posits, 'These enemies are the neighbouring peoples in whom Judah had placed its confidence, especially Egypt.' Barstad (1996:26) mentions Arameans, Moabites and Ammonites as nations that assisted Babylon to attack Jerusalem during Jehoiakim's rebellion. Renkema (1998:105) mentions Edomites in harmony with Obadiah 1:11-13, which indicates that the Edomites participated by looting in Jerusalem and by boasting over Jerusalem when captives were taken from Jerusalem. The author (1998:105) further indicates that those lovers were disloyal and deceptive as they joined forces with the enemies that destroyed Jerusalem. Salters (2010:41) posits, 'The poet may speak of the unreliability of alliances with other nations.' Renkema (1998:105) indicates that the allies of Jerusalem exerted political and religious pressure on the city to accept their gods. Thus, Judah compromised their relationship with YHWH, who alone had proved to be stronger than the ally nations in the past.

3. גלתה יהודה (Main clause)

{Judah went to captivity}

מעני ומרב עבדה (Causal clause)

{From affliction and from great slavery}

היא יושבה בגוים לא מצאה מנוח (Main clause)

{She dwells among the nations and she finds no rest}

כל־רדפיה השיגוה בין המצרים: (Main clause)

{All her pursuers have overtaken her between the straits}

The third verse states clearly that Judah went into captivity because of the destruction wrought by Babylonian armies. It should not escape cognitive comprehension that the poet of Lamentations is writing about a city as opposed to the whole country of Judah. When the poet-writer says that Judah went into captivity he actually refers to the people of Judah, according to Salters (2010:41). The writer (2010:41) continues to say that the act of deporting some of the people of the territory of Judah did not result in its captivity and posits, 'The real meaning ... is that the Jews had migrated ... had left their own country and fled to other countries.' Renkema (1998:108) expounds that captivity and slavery left the state of Judah to be bare or naked to such an extent that foreign troops walked about in Judah to enforce slavery. Furthermore, the writer (1998:109) intimates that the remnant could not execute their duties as in normal circumstances. Thus, the land was left desolate. Nevertheless, the use of the word 'Judah' in this verse seems to be causing the controversy found in theological realms, as to whether Judah was either totally or partially emptied or not at all. Clines (2003:618), with regard to Judah being in captivity, states, 'Perhaps the city is not entirely empty since there still seem to be priests in it, and young women, who often play a role at festivals.' With virtually all royalty and cultic officers deported to Babylon, and the appointment of Gedaliah, an illegitimate personality, to lead the poor cultivating the vineyards, the cultic services were suspended indefinitely. The essence of what Judah had been did not exist in Judah anymore, but in exile.

Affliction and the heavy burden of slavery are presented as occurrences that led to the captivity of Judah. Not all afflictions were caused by Babylon, as the suffering is inclusive of the famine in which the hand of God is not ruled out. The element of oppressing slavery was probably something that some Judeans could not endure and that pushed Jerusalem to breaking point. Huey (1993:451) indicates that the exile did not exclude those who opted to flee to other places

like Egypt and Edom. Berlin (2004:52) indicates that the Judeans were dispersed to other countries, including Babylon. The deportation of Judeans to Babylon cannot be underestimated; in fact, it is the biggest cause of the captivity of Judah.

The aspect that Judah dwelt among nations and found no rest appears to be somewhat controvertible. Salters (2010:43) sees the expression as a prophetic one alluded to in Deuteronomy 4:27; 28:64 and Jeremiah 9:15. After much argumentation, Renkema (1998:109-111) prefers to see these nations as neighbouring nations and the lack of rest as the experience of the remnant in Jerusalem, who lost plenty of goods and rest in their own land. However, Hillers (1972:6) finds the notion of Judah dwelling among the nations as a pre-exilic context or situation. Parry (2010:46) states, 'Now, after the exile, she dwells in the midst of the nations instead of in the land that YHWH had given to her.' Nichol ed. (1976c:547) deems the other nations as places where some citizens of Judah were exiled voluntarily or involuntarily. The lack of rest was experienced even by those who fled to other countries like Moab, Ammon, Edom and Egypt, 'but in vain', according to Salters (2010:43), who continues (2010:45) to state, 'Rumour had it that those who successfully escaped the Babylonian authorities were unable to settle in the country of their choice.' In this case, the exiles are regarded as the daughter of the widow who has no protection of her children due to the loss of her husband.

If Judah had actually been taken into captivity by the Babylonians, then even those who fled to other nations in fear of Babylon or refused to submit to Babylon are included in the notion that Judah dwelt among the nations. Even in Jerusalem, there was no rest. People infiltrating from other nationalities and law enforcers or soldiers roaming around and enforcing hard labour caused Judah or Jerusalem to have no rest at home. The final political disposition is that all the pursuers of Judah overtook her in the crisis she found herself. Babylon was not the only enemy of Judah, but all her allies became enemies as stated before, and all of them were successful in their attacks against Judah. There was no help all around Judah, since even friends had become enemies. The disaster of a famine drove Jerusalem into a tight corner, from where she could not escape or help herself. In her vulnerable state, all her pursuers overtook her. They looted the city and left her miserable.

4. דרכי ציון אבלות מבלי באי מועד (Main clause)
{The roads of Zion in mourning without (people) going to set (events)}
 כל-שעריה שוממין (Main clause)
{All her gates are desolate}
 כהניה נאנחים (Main clause)
{Her priests are groaning}
 בתולתיה נוגות (Main clause)
{Her virgins are afflicted}
 והיא מר-לה: (Main clause)
{And she experiences bitterness}

The fourth verse is more about the results of the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. Renkema (1998:112) argues that Zion is not synonymous to Jerusalem, but it denotes Jerusalem as a cultic city. Thus, the use of the name Zion puts the spotlight on the status of the cult. According to Berlin (2004:52), the element of the mourning streets signifies the 'absence of festival sacrifices and their accompanying celebrations.' However, Salters (2010:46) argues, 'That there was a complete cessation of the cult after 586 B.C.E. is uncertain ... but the poet is given to hyperbole.' The streets that would have been full of people moving around and seeking royal or cultic services are now empty of people, because now there are no cultic services, some priests have been executed and the temple has been destroyed. Judeans from outside Judah have no reason for going to Jerusalem anymore.

The desolation of her gates means that they are without life (Renkema, 1998:114). The cultic practices are no more and no one is attracted to Jerusalem or Zion. People are not coming through the gates of the city anymore. The desolation expressed here is intensified to the poets who still have memories of the past. Before the exile, there had been attendants or officers at the gates to assist people going into and out of the city, but during the exile, they are absent. Probably, normal trade activities around the city gates would also have ceased.

The priests are said to be groaning and virgins are afflicted. Renkema (1998:115) believes that the poets see priests who are continually 'groaning in anguish'. The writer further indicates that the priests cannot perform their duties and their survival in terms of earning a living in the

situation is not feasible. Salters (2010:47) says that the priests mourn for loss of income as in tithes. The residue of priests are engaged in mourning for the loss of what they have regarded as invincible, especially those priests who cherish the covenant of God, even though they have not complied with its terms and conditions at all times.

Renkema (1998:116), in agreement with Salters (2010:47), explains that the girls would normally sing and dance at festivals that have been practically discontinued and the author posits, 'It is not the enemy who has robbed these young girls of their festivals but YHWH himself.' With the cessation of festivals and the lamentations of priests, the girls remembering past jublations have no other option but to bear the affliction of the grim reality that there is no opportunity for dancing anymore.

The city is bitter. No one in the destroyed city has reason to be happy. The whole city feels pain and disappointment in seeing the gloominess as compared to the glory of former days, which were full of both tranquillity and pleasure. The writer, in the last part of the fourth verse, goes back to the figurative representation of Jerusalem – not of the whole land of Judah – as a mourning widow in bitterness. Renkema (1998:118) says that the widow is bitter because her offspring or inhabitants are affected by the exile experience.

Clearly, the Judah that had been taken captive dwelt primarily in Jerusalem and not all over the territory of Judah. Some of the poor, the priests and maidens remained in the destroyed city. The city was not empty at all. The talk of desolate gates restricts the discourse to the single city of Jerusalem.

6.3.1 Summary of the message

The message of Lamentations 1:1-4 is about the condition of Jerusalem because of the exile immediately after the reign of King Zedekiah. To the poet, the difference of the condition of Jerusalem prior to the exile and during the exile is so vast that he compares it to that of a widow with no one to comfort her. The population was significantly reduced. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the ally states or friends were disloyal to her and even assumed the position of a foe. Sadly, the former allies were not available to console her in any way, because

consoling her would probably appear as if they were supporting her. In addition, some were revealed to have been treacherous to Jerusalem by helping to loot the city itself. Judah was figuratively in bondage, as it was fully subjected to Babylon, even to the effect that eventually it did not even have the status of a province after Gedaliah had been assassinated. Metaphorically, the people and the land were captives of Babylon and the neighbouring states. They experienced this captivity in its most severe form as people inside and outside Jerusalem proved to be unreliable. Those living in other countries did not have anyone from a royal or political realm to alleviate their suffering. The cultic sphere was dealt a great blow by the destruction wrought by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. In Zion, no normal activity was found anymore. What was left to the priests as officials and the maidens as dancers during festivals was to lament the incredible tragedy executed by Babylonians. Their fond and pleasurable occupations or vocations had become obsolete. The essence of Jerusalem as capital city and Zion as cultic centre had been completely wiped out.

6.4 2 Chronicles 36:15-21

The breakdown of the above-mentioned passage is as follows:

15. ושלוח השכם מלאכיו ביד עליהם אבותיהם אלהי יהוה וישלח (Main Clause)
{And Yahweh the God of their fathers sent to them by the hand of His messengers rising early and sending}
 ביחמל על-עמו ועל-מונו: (Causal clause)
{For He had pity on His people and on His dwelling-place}

The messengers that God sent to his people were prophets whom He gave the task to rebuke and warn his people. Dillard (1987:300) explains that the prophets included early prophets and not only those who served in the final decades prior to the fall of Jerusalem. The author (1987:300) further regards prophets as custodians of 'theocracy.' Nichol **ed.** (1976b:316) specifically mentions Jeremiah, Habakkuk and Zephaniah as some of the prophets referred to in this case. The first clause of the verse (15) has a minor attachment consisting of the words 'rising early and sending', which is of major importance in understanding the first phrase properly. The attachment or clarifying words indicate that God took the initiative to send

redemptive messages to his people. The attempts that God made to save his people were not too late, but in time, and He was patient with his people. The fact that more than one prophet was sent clearly indicates that God was not swift to execute His extreme remedial action of the exile. He only resorted to exile when other harmless remedies had made no difference.

The reason for sending the prophets to warn his people was to afford them the opportunity to repent; thus, God communicated his love for his people, according to Japhet (1993:1071). The subsequent action that God had to take is not necessarily about who God is, but what his people had become. The writer of the book of Chronicles further indicates that not only did God have pity on his people, but also on his house or temple. What happened to his house and people should not be misconstrued to mean that God did not care about them from the onset. If God had not cared, He would not have sent messengers repeatedly to redeem his people.

16. ויהיו מלעבים במלאכי האלהים (Main clause)
{But they mocked the messengers of God}
ובוזים דבריו מתעתעים בנבאיו (Main clause)
{And despised His words and scoffed at His prophets}
עד עלות חמת־יהוה בעמו (Temporal clause)
{Until the wrath of Jehovah went up against His people}
עד־לאין מרפא: (Temporal clause)
{Until there was no healing}

Unfortunately, the response of the people of God, who were the elite in royal and cultic spheres, reacted negatively by mocking the prophets of God. Japhet (1993:1071) says that the negative response of the people of God is regarded as 'the gravest sin, for which there is no forgiveness.' What God had anticipated by sending his messengers was not likely to be realised. The compassion of God for his people was not appreciated.

The messenger and the message are not to be separated, but are treated similarly by the people to whom the message is sent, as the second phrase states. The people actually despised the words of God and scoffed at his prophets. It may appear as if they had been reacting

negatively towards the prophets, but simultaneously they reacted negatively towards God and his compassion for them. Indeed, they were sowing seeds to be reaped with bitterness.

The acts of mocking and scoffing prophets, and despising the words of God, occurred continuously, until it was evident that God's constructive measures to save his people yielded no fruit, not because of God's inability to convince them, but because of his people's hardened hearts. Japhet (1993:1071) regards the two final clauses of verse 16 as nominal clauses that indicate that eventually the wrath of God was released against his people and that there was no healing for them. The two phrases are not easily understood in their sequence. The first meaning would be that their incessant disobedience always increased the wrath of God. Moreover, their indifference to divine redemptive initiatives rendered them deserving of the wrath of God. The second understanding could be that there was no remedy for the people of God and thus the wrath of God could not be withheld anymore. The latter understanding would mean that the phrases are not written in their proper sequence, or that their sequential order did not matter to the writer of the book of Chronicles, or even that it is inherent in the nature of summarising writing not to be sensitive to the sequence of events or to reasoning from cause to effect. Salmon (1994:549), commenting on the fact that there was no remedy, states, 'It implies the cancellation of God's promise to heal his land and that therefore even prayer will be utterly useless...' God attempted to heal the land by sending his prophets, but the people continued their rebellion by despising the words of God.

17. ויעל עליהם את־מלך כשדיים (Main clause)

{And he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans.}

ויהרג בחוריהם בחרב בבית מקדשם (Main clause)

{And he killed their choice ones by the sword in the house of their sanctuary}

ולא חמל על־בחור ובתולה זקן וישש (Main clause)

{And had no pity on young man and virgin, old man or aged}

הכל נתן בידו: (Main clause)

{He gave all into his hand}

In this verse, God is presented as the one who acts by using the Babylonians to subject Judah or Jerusalem. Nichol **ed.** (1976b:316) explains that when Israel sinned, the Assyrians were allowed

to conquer Israel. This time, in the case of Judah, God brought the Chaldeans, who were less righteous than the Judeans were, to execute his judgement upon them. The Chaldeans did not conquer Judah or Jerusalem because of their own military power, but behind the scenes, God was working against his people out of wrath.

When the Babylonians acted as instruments of God, who was in a fury against his people, they killed some of the elite that were in their sanctuary that could have been the temple, according to Japhet (1993:1073). Even though God had pity for his temple, He allowed the Babylonians to kill some of the disobedient inhabitants of his own house as punishment for their rebellion. God determined the severity of the actions of the Babylonians, since He was the subject and the Babylonians were but the instruments or agencies. The killing of the elect people in God's house emphasises the fact that such severity was directed at Jerusalem, where God's house was situated.

Furthermore, the Babylonian king had no pity on the demographic groups of Jerusalem, as young men, virgins and the aged were affected. Japhet (1993:1073) expounds that such a presentation of tragedy is drawn from Ezekiel 9:5-7, which indicates that God revealed there should be no selectivity in the killing, except that the people who bore a particular mark, as Ezekiel did, should be passed. Mercilessness was characteristic of what transpired during the executions.

Finally, this verse says that God gave all his people in the hand of the King of Babylon. The killed and the exiled were given to the king to deal with as he pleased. Even those who were left alive in Jerusalem were given to the Babylonian king and were made part of his resources to use at will. Obviously, the rest of the citizens of Judah outside the capital city were similarly subjected to Babylon. Thus, Babylon ruled all Judah after exterminating all governance structures in the capital city.

18. וכל כלי בית האלהם הגדלים והקטנים ואצרות בית יהוה (Main clause)
ואצרות המלך ושריו הכל הביא בבל:

{And all the articles of the house of God, the large and the small, and the treasures of the house of Yahweh, and the treasures of the King and his heads, all he brought to Babylon}

The people were all given to the King of Babylon. Consequently, all the possessions of the people of God became the property of Babylon, who had the power to move them as they saw fit. The vessels in the house of God, big and small, and all the treasures were at the Babylonians' disposal. Though God did not give the vessels and treasures to the Babylonians, it was to be expected that looting would occur.

It not only happened in the house of God, but also in the royal realms the king and his heads lost their treasures to the Chaldean king. Japhet (1993:1073) explains that the looting in the king's house occurred during the reign of Jehoiachin, but the vessels inside the temple were taken during the reign of King Zedekiah. This verse was not written according to the sequence of events at all. As the book of Chronicles is theological rather than historical, placing the looting of the temple first could be theologically significant or intentional, giving preference to theological aspects and not to historical aspects. A historical record would not ascribe any event related to the fall of Jerusalem to God, but to the Babylonians, who invaded Jerusalem. All royal and cultic treasures were taken to Babylon, even though not all were transferred at the same time. Apparently, either the writer of the final clause of verse 18 wrote it in Babylon or he witnessed the vessels being brought to a place where he had been. However, it is acceptable that the book of Chronicles was written after the exile by Judean community member(s) that had been probably exiled, but were engaged in a process of national restoration.

19. וִישְׂרָפוּ אֶת־בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּנְתְּצוּ אֶת חֹמַת יְרוּשָׁלַם (Main clause)

וְכָל־אֲרָמְנוֹתֶיהָ בָּאֵשׁ וְכָל־כְּלֵי מַחְמָדֶיהָ לְהַשְׁחִית:

*{And they burned the house of God, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem,
and all its palaces they burned with fire, and destroyed all its valuable articles.}*

Babylon, after looting the temple and palaces, burnt the house of God (temple) and the palaces. Some of the important articles in the palaces were destroyed. In the process of destruction, even the fortification wall of Jerusalem was broken down. This verse appeals to the

imagination of the readers in Jerusalem, the capital city, as it restricts the account to the destruction of the palaces and the temple.

20. ויגל השארית מן-החרב אל-בבל (Main clause)
{*And he exiled those who escaped from the sword to Babylon*}
ולבניו לעבדים ויהיו-לו (Main clause)
{*And they were to him and his sons for slaves*}
על-מלך מלכות פרס: (Temporal clause)
{*Until the reign of the kingdom of Persia*}

This verse briefly explains what was done (by Babylonians) with some of the persons that were alive in the city of Jerusalem at the time of their return to Babylon. In verse seventeen, those who were killed are identified as persons of choice or the elite. Thus, persons that survived the sword had been probably in Jerusalem since the final destruction by Babylon occurred in Jerusalem in 587 BCE. Japhet (1993:1074) concludes that those who were executed by the sword were actually killed in Jerusalem and not in exile. Nichol *ed.* (1976b:316) highlights that Judeans were exiled during the reign of Zedekiah, but the author also mentions the deportation of 605 BCE in accordance with 2 Kings 24:1 and Daniel 1:1; the deportation carried out in the seventh year of King Nebuchadnezzar in 598 BCE; the exile of some Judeans in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BCE; and the exile of some Judeans in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BCE. Nichol *ed.* (1976b:316) mentions, in addition to the critical exile of 586 BCE, the exile in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar in 582 BCE. The exile of 586 BCE established the reality of Judah being exiled in several ways. First, the last legitimate king of Judah was dethroned and murdered by the Babylonians for his disloyalty. Second, after him Gedaliah, who was not a legitimate king of Judah, was murdered. Finally, the status of Judah as a state ended, when it became a province for a while rendering it fully as part of Babylon.

Coggins (2003:312) says that the Chronicler purports that all residents were taken captive, but the author posits, 'Historically this is most unlikely, and Jer 52:28-30 gives a very different picture.' The Bible writer or the Chronicler does not say that all were carried to Babylon, but that the elite in Jerusalem that had escaped the sword were coercively taken to Babylon. Historically, the poor were left to work in the vineyards. Japhet (1993:1074) explains that the

Chronicler did not eschew the fact that poor people remained and succinctly states, 'In fact, according to the chronicler's own description, the destruction fell upon Jerusalem alone, its people, its buildings and the house of the Lord; there is no hint in the passage itself of any damage to the land of Judah or to its people.' The writer (1993:1074) further indicates that the Chronicler applied the approach of Deuteronomic history regarding the time of Jehoiachin. Mathys (2001:308) conjectures that the Chronicler purposely skips the experiences of the poor people that remained in the land or city.

From a theological point of view, some scholars, like Mazzinghi (1998:673) and Mathys (2001:308), decipher the reference to Leviticus 26 in the brief account of the exile according to 2 Chronicles 36 (see 6.5.2 below). Some Bible translators may be responsible for mistranslation and some theologians may be to blame for arguing theology based on Bible translations and not on the Hebrew text. However, if the above-mentioned text in Chronicles is read within context and closely to the Hebrew text, the Chronicler is historically quite correct.

Finally, the last clause indicates that the exiled elite became slaves of the Babylonian king and his sons until the advent of the Persian Empire. This final clause implicitly reports that other cities in Judah were not destroyed like Jerusalem and that no other exile that occurred outside Jerusalem within Judah territory until the very end of the Babylonian hegemony. The writer of Chronicles does not use the word 'Judah' in saying that some persons who escaped the sword were exiled.

21. למלאות דברי־יהוה בפי ירמיהו (Purpose clause)
 {In order to fulfill the word of Jehovah in the mouth of Jeremiah}
 עד־רצתה הארץ עת־שבתותיה (Temporal clause)
 {Until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths}
 כל־ימי השמה שבתה (Main clause)
 {All the days of the desolation it kept the Sabbath}
 לסלאות שבעים שנה: (Temporal clause)
 {Until seventy years were fulfilled}

This verse is more about the meaning of the duration of the exile period. The message of YHWH through the prophet Jeremiah (25:9-11) declared that the imminent captivity period under the Babylonian regime would be seventy years. The writer of Chronicles emphasises that Jeremiah's prophecy was the word of Jehovah that had to be fulfilled, just like the prophecy of the invasion and defeat of Judah by Babylon had to be fulfilled. God planned the defeat of Judah and the duration of the captivity.

The land was to enjoy the so-called Sabbath rest as expressed in Leviticus 26:34-35, according to Thompson (1994:391), who claims that because of disobedience, the land would have a Sabbath rest, which would otherwise have been 'denied'. Salmon (1994:550) regards the Sabbath rest as desolation. Japhet (1993:1075) agrees to the aspect of desolation, something the land had never experienced while Judah occupied it. Japhet (1993:1075) further indicates that the land was not to be lost permanently, but that the Judeans could anticipate restoration to the land. A Sabbath is naturally not a permanent period, but a period that starts and ends. Thus, the Sabbath aspect of the duration of desolation or exile implies that there would be an end to the unfortunate situation.

The period as prophesied by Jeremiah was to be seventy years. Dillard (1987:301) presents two views about the beginning and end of the period. The first view would mark the beginning of the period as 605 BCE and its end as 539 BCE (the date of the decree of Cyrus, King of Persia). These dates are in accordance with the first exile and the official freedom declaration for the return. The second view is that the exile would begin in 586 BCE and end in 516 BCE, with the dedication of the second temple. Dillard (1987:301) conjectures that 'seventy' was not meant as a literal number. The first view amounts to about 66 years, while the latter view amounts to about 70 years. The former view is but one of the schools of thought as regards the starting-point of the exile, while the latter view propagates or seeks to present the period literally as seventy years. The latter view may be disputed, because it must be taken into account that by 516 BCE, the exiles had been back for a relatively long time and that the desolation was no longer severely felt. The most realistic view is the one that presents God as a relenting and gracious God, who was not bound to the exact given period of the exile. This view would count

the exile from 586 BCE (the massive execution and exile of the elite of Jerusalem) to 538 BCE (the decree of Cyrus authorizing the return to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem), which amounts to about 46 years. The difference of about 24 years accounts for God's grace for his people.

Japhet (1993:1076) perceives the controversial period of 70 years as 'historical' and 'theological' in nature, and not a fixed literal number. Dillard (1987:301) intimates, 'From the vantage point of the restoration, the seventy years of sabbatical rests prepared the land for the returnees; it allowed time for recuperation.' Salmon (1994:550) sees this period as a 'restorative' and 'punitive' time. The author (1994:550) further indicates that the 70 years are equal to a person's life span and states, 'An entire generation had to be removed to prevent any human being stealing God's credit by attempting to resurrect a future out of remains of the past.' The exile was not all about total doom and gloom, but hope, as God limited the desolation period numerically and by converting the desolation to restoration through the Sabbath description of the period. The exile was not the end of Judah. It is remarkable that the actions of Cyrus were prophesied by "second Isaiah" (in 44:28), who served as a prophet during the exile.

6.4.1 Summary of the message

The message of 2 Chronicles 36:15-21 presents God as the chief orchestrator and the Judeans as the cause of the tragedy that befell Jerusalem up to 586 BCE. Before YHWH made use of Babylon to deal with his people, He noticed their offensive sins against Him. He initiated, out of compassion for his people and his house, redemptive measures by sending prophets to rebuke his people in order for them to repent. Unfortunately, the initiative of utilising prophets to save his people from his own wrath, which could be unleashed due to their impenitence, did not yield envisaged outcomes. The Judeans, instead of recanting their sins, mocked and scoffed the prophets, which effectively meant they repeatedly derided the message together with its messengers. At such a stage, there was no way God's wrath could be inhibited and there was no other way God would help the Judeans to repent. Thus, the wrath of God was unleashed through the Babylonian Empire, whom God used as his instrument against the Judeans in Jerusalem. God handed over all the inhabitants of the land of Jerusalem, irrespective of age, to

the Babylonians' ruthlessness permitted by God. Many citizens were murdered arbitrarily. Furthermore, the palaces and the temple were looted and stripped of treasures, and eventually burnt down. Some of the Judeans that escaped executions were carried off to Babylon and were made servants of the Chaldean kings until the Persian Empire succeeded that of Babylonians. The status quo prevailed relatively in accordance with the prophecy of Jeremiah that stipulated that the exile would prevail for 70 years. The land would lie fallow and that would be like a Sabbath rest, which is normally a period that begins and ends. Therefore, severe as the exile was, it was not intended to prevail forever, for the prophecy of Jeremiah also expressed hope for restoration. To the writer of Chronicles, what transpired regarding the exile was history with theological significance, and not a mere record of past events.

6.5 Redaction criticism

The concept of the exile that is expressed in the books of Leviticus, Deuteronomy and probably some exilic sources like Lamentations are understood by some scholars to have been edited partially during the exilic period and finally after the exilic period. The understanding is that the exile concept was introduced in the Torah during the redaction process. This section focuses on this matter in order to arrive at a realisation that actually the wording of the texts about the exile favours a probability of the exile being expressed it actually occurred.

The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms (1996:233) defines redaction as 'editorial ordering of textual material.' With regard to redaction criticism, the Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms (1996:233) circumscribes it to the New Testament, especially the Synoptic Gospels. The author goes on to explain that in this endeavour scholars seek to organise and structure the information derived from the literature at their disposal. The Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms (1999:100) defines redaction criticism as a scholarly biblical interpretive approach with emphasis on the literary and theological work of Bible authors. The author further deems the scholars as persons that do analysis of how the Bible writers could have altered the literature in hand in order to innovatively and intentionally reach their particular thrust. Gorman (2009:16) succinctly defines redaction criticism saying that 'the quest for perceiving the ways in which the final author of the text purposely adopted and adapted

sources.’ Hayes and Holladay (1988:101) indicates that the purpose of an interpreter who uses the redaction criticism approach is to shed light on the import of the final redacted passage or literature in its written form. Perrin (1970:viii) states, ‘Redaction criticism is concerned with the interaction between an inherited tradition and a later interpretive point of view.’ Graphically, this process could be explained in terms of building a brick wall, where bricks are put together by using mortar, and some bricks have to be cut to fit into the architectural wall construction specifications.

However, Stuart (2009:140) with acknowledgements of scholars that have written on redaction criticism states, ‘It therefore requires analysis of the work of the (anonymous) editors of the section or book, and it is accordingly a very speculative kind of criticism since nothing is directly known about editorial activity or the editors themselves.’ Gorman (2009:118) outlines the difficulties of redaction criticism as uncertainty that a particular source was used, sporadic certainty about the reason for the use and modification of a particular source, and uncertainty whether modifications of a source are purposeful or important. It is acceptable that writing down some books in the Bible was not done as events were unfolding. Sometimes the language of a given passage would clearly sound as if it had been informed by later events. Biblical texts that allude to a possible exile in future before it actually occurred are believed by some scholars to have been written during the exile and as additions to the older information or tradition. The belief that nothing biblical was written before the exile leads to the view that even past events were written down during the exile, with additions made in the process of writing, especially regarding the events that relate to the exile. The idea of such a belief is that the exile concept was added to an older oral tradition when the latter was written down around the exile period. The section on ‘Golah work’ will shed more light on this kind of belief (see 6.5.1 below).

Theologically, the passages of Lamentations 1:1-4 and 2 Chronicles 36:15-21 are generally linked to other biblical texts, especially since they concern the exile. The other passages to which the selected passages relate are Leviticus 26:14-43 and Deuteronomy 28:58-68. Later on in the thesis, further explanation will be given of these related passages (see 6.5.2 below)

In affirming that the exile had a bearing on the nature of biblical books, Sharp (2004:153) states, 'That Israel's experience of exile in 587 B.C.E. was profoundly formative for the shaping of traditions and texts in Scripture has long been recognized.' Gerstenberger (2002:212) hints at the sentiment that information on existent scriptures actually being burnt at the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE is available in some apocryphal literature. The author (2002:212) believes that the work of writing scriptures again was done by Ezra, who employed his recalling capabilities to write down the whole literature from the beginning. The author (2002:207) also presents the thought that during the exile, religious documents were written by relying on old traditions, and in the process, theological perceptions and interpretations were renewed. The actual belief of the writer (2002:209) is that the tradition of the people of Judah was largely oral in nature before the exile. The ideas espoused by Gerstenberger (2002: 212) and Sharp (2004: 153) as suggested above seek to render the whole Old Testament as a work that was only written from the exilic period. Thus, concerning the contents of the written accounts relating to past events way before the exile, scholars can freely choose what they want to believe and what they want to reject. To sum up, all Old Testament literature is seen as recollections and additions to recollections written down and nothing was foretold about the exile in older pre-exilic literature or traditions.

Some scholars apply source criticism beyond the Pentateuch and seek to classify concepts and accounts of the Old Testament as mere schools of thought. Some of the sources referred to are the Priestly source and the Yahwist source, since they seem to relate to the exilic period. Preuss (1996:119) concisely regards the Yahwist source to be older than the Priestly source. The writer (1996:119) dates the Yahwist source back from the Davidic era to the end of the monarchic era. A critical analysis of historical events is characteristic of this source. According to this source, all major events, whether good or catastrophic, were executed by God. The author (1996:199) concludes that the Priestly source was intended to 'console and comfort the exilic community, secure its stability, and direct it toward a new future.' The author (1996:121) further presents Deuteronomic History as a source that paves the way for a better future based on God's promises. The author says such a future is dependent on contrition by God's people and compliance with God's commandments. Person (2010:23) dates the Deuteronomic work to the

exilic period and says that it was, among other things, informed by pre-exilic sources. The author (2010:25) believes that Deuteronomic History originated in the exilic era and that its redaction took place during the same era up to the post-exilic era. Person (2010:65-66) argues that for some time, Israel made more use of oral tradition. This situation prevailed until the end of the monarchical period, when a written culture came into being.

With regard to the selected passages, Lamentations 1:1-4 and 2 Chronicles 36:15-21, it should be clear that their date, audience and purpose are of critical importance for the concept of the exile of Judah to be well perceived. The book of Lamentations dates to the exilic period and the audience were the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the exilic era and God Himself. The purpose of the book of Lamentations is multi-dimensional in nature. Primarily, the destruction of Jerusalem, which disrupted cultic and royal services, is the cause of mourning. The pain in Lamentations is expressed before God, the Maker of the nation of Judah. Introspection is done to identify the cause of the destruction and exile, which is sin. Hope is also expressed. The depiction of the bleak situation in Jerusalem during the period of exile clearly shows that Judah, as a state should have been characterised by particular cultic practices, has become non-existent in the land.

The book of Chronicles was clearly written in the post-exilic era. The audience of the book was particularly the elite that had returned from exile and were engaged in cultic restoration work in Jerusalem. The purpose of the book is to highlight theology throughout the history of specifically Judah, since very little is said about Israel. The book reveals the work of God in the events of the history of Judah, including the exile they experienced. The main point of the book concerns the temple and its services, which were being restored after they had been halted by the exile to Babylon.

6.5.1 Golah work

The Golah exiles were those who dwelt in Babylon during the exile and whose brainchild was Judaism. Birch *et al.* (1999:345) observe, 'The Bible devotes almost all of its energies to the community of Jews deported to Babylon.' Knight (1977:224) concurs by saying that reports of

life in Judah were obscured by reports of experiences in Babylon. Birch *et al.* (1999:345) continue to allege that the Golah exiles assumed the position of being the genuine expositors and formulators of Jewish beliefs. The authors (1999:420) suspect that the exiles regarded themselves as the true Jews and further postulate, 'The experiences of the Babylonian exile became theologically and politically normative.' Gerstenberger (2002:211) believes that even the Torah was the joint product of the exiles and the remnant in Judah from the beginning of the exile up to and including the period immediately thereafter. It is interesting that the writer sees some cooperation between the Golah and remnant Jews in compiling the Bible. Levin (2010a:74), in view of the concept of the anger of God, especially in the book of Jeremiah, says that such a concept could have been a later addition of a Golah community to the conventional literature of the time. It must be indicated that the Bible should not be defined in general terms that see no exceptions at all.

While it is a fact that much more is said about Golah experiences according to, among others, Knight (1977: 224), the writing and the contents of the book of Lamentations is an indictment on the belief that everything in the Old Testament is a product of Golah propaganda. Lamentations 1 hints at the exile of Judah during the exile, thus confirming the havoc wreaked by the Babylonians. The compilers of the book of Lamentations seem to have done their work in Jerusalem early after the beginning of the exile, and internal evidence does not indicate that the book was written by Judeans who visited Judah from exile. The authorship of the book of Lamentations is ascribed to remnant Judeans in Jerusalem before the end of the exile. The fact that Judah was left without a functional centre was keenly felt in Jerusalem by those who remained. Perhaps other concepts could be of Golah origin, but certainly not the concept of the exile of Judah. It cannot be said that the whole Bible is a reconstruction of Golah thought.

The propagation of Golah work in the production of biblical literature goes further to actually indicate that character names like 'Moses', 'God' and others were actually used to authenticate their perceptions. Levin (2010a:62-63) alleges that the Bible authors writing about the exile experience were subjected to a plan to raise one part of society above another. The author (2010:62-63) further assumes:

‘The theological program is put into the mouth of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. They are supposed to have prophesied between the first and the second conquest of Jerusalem, and to have proclaimed salvation to the exiles of 597 B.C.E., and disaster to the Jerusalem that was left.’

Gerstenberger (2002:212) reasons that the character of Moses was redone and made to be a standard by successive leaders according to their religious position; thus, when they expressed the determination of God they invoked the character of Moses in order to use it for their own ends. This view renders the historicity of the character of Moses questionable. Furthermore, this view gives Bible readers the choice to believe and disbelieve at will, because writers of the Bible could have used the character of Moses almost any time.

6.5.2 Redaction in Leviticus 26

2 Chronicles 36, the final chapter of this book, clearly uses the wording of Leviticus 26:34 with regard to the nature of an exile that could occur subsequent to disobedience or rebellion. Muller (2010b:207) says that the consequences of obedience and disobedience, as spelled out in Leviticus 26, are reminiscent of final terms and conditions of ANE ‘laws and vassal’ contracts. The writer, audience and structure of Leviticus 26 are presented such that the writer of 2 Chronicles is said to have done redaction on Leviticus 26; in fact, he might even be the author of Leviticus 26. The audience of the Leviticus 26 would be the post-exilic community in Judah.

Muller (2010b:228) argues that part of the work of the book of Leviticus belongs to an older writer, even Moses, while other parts could have been revised by Jeremiah or Ezekiel. To this end, Muller (2010b:228) claims, ‘Many words and phrases from Lev 26 and Ezek 34 parallel each other.’ The writer continues to claim that the audience of Leviticus 26 could be people who had experienced the exile in Babylon. The writer (2010:227) sees Leviticus 26:42 to be of the Priestly Code in nature, since it puts emphasis on the covenant of Abraham and Jacob. However, Levin (2010a:80) points out a name, Nergalsharezer, which appears in Jeremiah 39:3 as a later addendum and surmises, ‘Apparently the late scribes could draw on some vague historical knowledge about Neo-Babylonian court officials.’ Thus, it shows that biblical literature is more about theology than history. Leviticus 26 is under scrutiny for using wording similar to

that of the book of Chronicles. If it had not been for the similarities in wording, the possibility of a later redaction of Leviticus 26 would not have been stretched to such a limit.

The identification of anachronism in Leviticus 26 is a manifestation of minimalistic ideas about the historicity and reliability of biblical literature. Bullock (2003:99) poignantly states, 'The minimalist position is a reductionist approach to biblical history, holding that, for various reasons ... the historical framework of the Old Testament ... does not carry the weight of historicity.' Sharp (2004:159) regards minimalists as historians that purport that most of Old Testament literature was produced by 'imaginings' from the Persian to the Hellenistic eras, as opposed to earlier writing. Although not a minimalist, Rogerson (2010:23-24), believes that some Old Testament writings were concluded during the period of the exile and restoration – with the aid of the memory of survivors of the monarchic era. The help of the memory of monarchic era survivors is not sufficient to corroborate how scriptures were concluded, because prophets like Zechariah, Haggai and the writer(s) of the book of Malachi do not speak from memory, but as functioning prophets of the post-exilic era.

It is unfortunate that speculation can be exercised without limitations to the point of wanting to argue about what is recorded in the Bible. History is not superior over theology. Probably, historical criticism used by minimalists may discredit the Bible and reject the theology in it, because it does not seem to be compatible with their historical knowledge. Whether the biblical facts about the exile are acceptable from a historical point of view or not, they are written from a theological point of view only. This leads to the subject of the relationship between history and theology.

6.6 History and theology

The matter of the emptiness of Judah during the exile as a concept in the Old Testament relates to history and theology. Barstad (1996:30) refers to the books of Kings, Chronicles and Jeremiah as 'sources for the historian.' Furthermore, the writer (1996:45) harps on the so-called 'history writing', which presents a *tabula rasa* impression of the state of Palestine during the exilic period. It is unfortunate that most Bible students rely on the Bible for the history of Israel or

Judah. Whether the writers of biblical passages that infer or clearly state that Judah was exiled were theologians or historians has not been the focus in the debate about the matter at hand. It has been established that the writers of Lamentations and Chronicles were largely cultic persons in Jerusalem during and after the exile respectively. Due to the writers' functions in cultic realms, they might have been more of theologians than they were historians. Of course, a theologian can choose to be a historian and vice versa, but each time when they write they ought to be clear as to which area of interest they are advancing.

Roberts (2002:60) argues that proper historiography originated in Israel and not Mesopotamia or Egypt. The historiography referred to here should not mean that the Bible contains all history of Israel or Judah. Bullock (2003:97-98) in defining history succinctly states, 'History is a human enterprise of chronologically selecting and recording events in time and space, and doing so interpretatively or with a particular perspective.' The writer (2003:97-98) continues to indicate that unrefined facts are presented with their interpretation in the biblical record. The elements of selecting and interpreting are extremely critical in biblical records. If any historical gaps are found in the biblical discourse, they are deliberately made and may not be regarded as historical blind spots. All history in the Bible, including the history of Israel, might have been selected and accompanied by interpretations of some events.

The book of Chronicles refers to the following historical sources: the records of Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Ahija, Iddo, the prophet Isaiah, the book of Kings of Israel and Judah and the annals of Jehu (1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29; 13:22; 16:11; 20:34; 27:22; 32:32). The book of Chronicles implicitly concedes that it does not record some events or details that can be found in other sources, which are clearly indicated. In this case, the selection is not concealed, but declared.

6.6.1 The relationship between history and theology

The book of Chronicles, in highlighting some sources of other activities performed by some kings, mentions the book of Kings of Israel and Judah. This might give the impression that the book of Kings as it is found in our conventional Bibles is the source to which it refers. However,

Levin (2010a:64) clears the matter when he refers to 2 Kings 24:8-17 saying, 'These details are taken from the Annals of the Judean kings, on which the biblical books of Kings are based.' According to Person (2010:164), the book of Kings is part of the so-called Deuteronomic history that, among other sources, is said to have been used by the Chronicler. The writer (2010:164) argues that the redaction of Deuteronomic history, inclusive of the books of Kings, extended to the Persian era 'bringing Deuteronomic History closer in time to Chronicles ... Hence, the Deuteronomic History and the book of Chronicles can be reasonably understood as competing contemporary historiographies descended from a common source.' Person (2010:167-168) argues further that the Chronistic school dislodged the Deuteronomic school as an institution and concedes that there might have been a relationship between the two schools, even though the Chronistic one would be ranking higher, yet newer, at that time. Although it might be believed that the Chronicler used the book of Kings, the element of superiority and inferiority may not be ruled out; thus, minimal use of the book Kings can be deduced.

Clearly, in normal relationships, seniority or superiority does exist. It has to be clear as to which is paramount in the general biblical record, history or theology. Sharp (2004:155) tersely states, 'Theology comes first: history is understood and represented in the Bible ... as the contextual accidents through which God makes the divine will known.' The author (2004:155) continues to indicate that the exile was a vehicle through which God's character would be revealed. In dealing with the tension between myth and biblical history, Roberts (2002:71) intimates:

'One must be aware of the possible mythological use of history as well as the historical use of myth. Moreover, the investigation cannot be limited to the historiographical material. An adequate comparative study must examine the theological interpretations of historical events across the whole spectrum of literary genres native to the cultures being compared.'

It is clear that the theology of any biblical accounts may not be ignored. Moreover, before a historical analysis of a particular biblical text or passage is made, the theology should be understood first. Throughout the Old Testament, theology is primary and history is secondary or minor, and it may not be made superior over theology to a point of labelling everything as a mere invention or composition devoid of theology or truth.

6.6.2 Literary technique

Some scholars may regard the genre of the texts that deal with the emptiness of Judah during exile, excluding the book of Lamentations, as history. However, when an in-depth study is made of the books, it would appear that they are not purely historical. The techniques that some Bible writers employed to emphasise their ideas or purposes should be identified and analysed to understand what the writers of the Bible wanted to achieve. Kessler (2010:312) recognises that the language of the sources written by returnees about the empty land of Judah during the exile is not historical in nature. According to Stipp (2010:111), the issue of the flight to Egypt, which left Judah empty of residents, is '... a deliberate overstatement for reasons of emphasis ... the writer excessively inflated the size of the fugitive party.' The writer (2010:113) goes on to say the sentiment that Judah was left empty during the exile may not be considered as a hyperbole, but as a completely deliberate expression. To Levin's (2010a:61), such a presentation of history was intended to underscore the fact that the persons duly responsible for the reconstruction of the Jewish society had been exiled. The author asserts, '... Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, Hermann-Josef Stipp, and myself, have discovered that this claim rests on purposeful revisions.'

There is nothing amiss about the expression that says Judah went into exile. It is not a myth, hyperbole or a lie. It is historically, politically and theologically correct that Judah went into exile. Historians should not look at theology from a statistical point of view. For instance, in Genesis 22:17, God promises Abraham that his offspring will be as numerous as the sand of the seashore or the stars. Now, without being much derailed, not all particles of the seashores have to be counted and all stars counted to be compared with historical headcounts of Abraham's descendants for this expression to be accepted. The point is the descendants' innumerability. In the case of Judah being exiled, the point is that key persons in Judah were exiled and others were executed; thus, figuratively, Judah remained without a centre that holds everything together. The heart of Judah went into exile.

6.6.3 Theological objective

Although the contents of the books of Kings and Chronicles appear to be historical in nature, the question that should be asked is whether the writers intended to share historical or theological information. Another question would be whether the history of the intended addressees were communicated orally or by means of written documents of the time. If the addressees had already been in possession of their nation's history in some form, it would have been pointless to inform the informed.

Smith (1989:32) regards the Deuteronomic writer as the major historical writer of Israelite history. Klein (1979:23) lists Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings as books written by Deuteronomic writers. The author (1979:23) believes that Deuteronomic writings were written during the exilic period and asserts, 'Its purpose was overwhelmingly didactic and theological; the author was not trying to present an objective narrative of the facts of history.' Gertz (2010:11-12) in comparing the history of Israel to that of Judah in the light of the disasters experienced, perceives that the prophecies of the Old Testament were theodicean efforts in reaction to disasters.

Stipp (2010:104-105), referring to 2 Chronicles 36:20-21, believes that the book was written centuries after the exile and thus it was structured according to the exilic perceptions of the writers of that time. The writer (2010:105) accentuates that the concept of the empty land 'does not relate to the exilic period....' Levin (2010a:61) argues that the history of Judah would be changed, if the concept of the emptiness of Judah during the exile would be part of the history of Judah. Understanding the concept of the emptiness of Judah depends on whether the biblical expressions to that effect are read using a theological or historical lens. Biblical writings may not be digested as history, but as theology. The starting point determines the finishing point; if the reader begins with a historical approach, the end will be a dead end; if the approach is theological, the end will be the acceptance of theological realities as enshrined in biblical records. The purpose of Bible writers, even where they sound historical, is theological.

6.7 Politics and religion

The politics and religion of Judah are inseparable to such an extent that it is virtually impossible to talk about one without the other. What precipitates this reality is that Yahweh is God and King of kings at the same time. God was supreme in economic, royal and cultic spheres. An attempt to separate Judah's politics from its religion is likely to be unsuccessful. Political activities and changes in Judah were subject to Yahweh's determination. The religion and politics prior to the exile were rejected by God, because they were not conducted according to his demands. The diplomatic reliance on other nations for survival and relying on other gods in Judah's idolatry were irreparably offensive to the jealous God. As a result, a furious God handed the politics and the cult over to the Babylonians.

Judaism, which originated and emerged in Babylon, was contrary to the Yahwism that led to the exile, and raises a political aspect of the history and theology of Judah. Aberbach (2001:211) indicates that the advent of Judaism was precipitated by the exile. The author (2001:211) goes on to highlight that the worship of idols was abandoned, because it did not reward the worshippers. Indeed, it only attracted God's indignation, which brought about the exile. The author (2001:211) also says that the resolve of Judaism was to uphold monotheism. Smith (1989:53) conjectures that the exiles in Babylon could have had a minority complex, which might have been the cause of conflict after the exile. The author (1989:64) further posits the following: '... the survival of a minority as a group depends on their success in creating a solid community with social boundaries. This solidarity in exile then creates separation from the population that did not endure exile.' The politics of the Golah Jewry was intricately intertwined with their religion. Not only did they reform religiously, but politically they also created a fence around themselves to survive. Gerstenberger (2002:208) hints at the fact that the deportees were not scattered all over Babylon, but settled in close proximity to each other; thus, they grew in numbers and they were able to maintain their culture and traditions. Curtis (2003:302) states, 'Babylonia became the spiritual and cultural center for the people who would soon become known to the world as Jews.' Probably, the Golah community could have harboured a

fear that reconciling with the remnant would be tantamount to reverting to a lifestyle that would subsequently lead to the exile.

The Golah community as a whole could have thought that they were the only adherents to the standards of the real Jewish practices; however, the voluntary return to Jerusalem was yet to reveal the real adherents to Jewish standards. House (1998:515) dares to assert that the real remnant were those who chose to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. This is another theological concept that will be addressed later, when dealing with the analogy of good and bad figs (see 6.9.4 below).

The concept of the empty land of Judah during the exile raises political questions and suspicions. It would appear that the returnees propagated the belief or assumption that there was none left in Jerusalem during the exile in order to relegate the remnant to nothingness for political reasons. Sharp (2004:159) sees political motives in Bible writers that write about the emptiness of Judah during the exile. The writer explains that, as portrayed in the Bible, the concept is a theme that was developed to suite the political desires of the returned elite. Even though the inflexibility of the returnees might appear to be political, the reality is that the motive for their rigidity was religious. This is proven by the fact that the returnees did not have a mentality of annihilating the remnant that they found in the land. At that time, a separation of religion and politics subtly surfaced, even though the returnees had greater political muscle because of their direct connection with the Persian government. The issue of the emptiness of Judah was not a Golah political construct to displace the remnant, since the book of Lamentations also acknowledges the concept of the emptiness of Judah because of the emptiness of the capital city, Jerusalem. If Gedaliah had not been murdered by the conspiracy of Ishmael, a different political system could probably have been developed. There was a glaring void of leadership in Judah due to the utter emptiness as regards leadership structures throughout the exile.

6.8 Exilic realities

The theological concept of the emptiness of Judah during the exile should not ignore the realities of the exile, as if religion is indeed *the opium of the people*. Both the writers and students of the Bible should agree on theological concepts and historical realities. It has been established that Bible translations may probably not be accurate on the point of all Judah being completely exiled. The actual context puts the elite (cultic and royal persons) who were either executed or exiled in 587 BCE at the centre of the discourse. The equilateral view should be that theology does not reject, undermine or criticise history and vice versa.

6.8.1 Exile not total

The exile did occur and clearly, no Bible writer meant that there were no Judeans residing in any town throughout Judah during the exile. The Bible writers wrote about Judah being exiled while focusing on Jerusalem as the capital in their writings. Barstad (1996:26) comments on 2 Kings 24-25, which, among other things, mentions that Nebuchadnezzar carried away all Jerusalem, and further portrays 'all Jerusalem' to mean all princes, strong and brave men, artisans and smiths. The book of Kings partially focuses on Jerusalem and indicates that the poor were left behind. Furthermore, in 2 Kings 25: 21, after the report on the execution of some priests and some civil officers in 587 BCE, it is stated that Judah went into captivity away from her land. Probably, the fact that the functions performed and executed by the exiled and murdered elite had ceased in Judah meant that Judah was exiled. Knight (1977:224) rightly elucidates that many people of Jewish origin and identity remained in Judah, even though it is not known how many remained, and that they might have claimed to be the real Judeans as opposed to the exiles. Birch and Brueggemann (1999:345) explain that the exile of the elite happened to be termed as 'the exile', although not all Judeans were deported. The authors (1999:345) further emphasise that the exile did not empty the land of Judah. Levin (2010:1) appropriately acknowledges that a population reduction occurred during the exile, and moderates the idea of a comprehensive exile by saying that the deportation was not complete and massive. The Bible does not report or position theology on a foundation of statistics, but on the grounds of the non-existence of legitimacy and administrative order, after the rightful

persons had been exiled and even voluntarily migrated. The significance of the elite in Judah is the heart of the matter. Statistically, not all residents of Judah were exiled during the Babylonian Empire.

6.8.2 The impact of the exile

The theological concept of the emptiness or exile of Judah relates precisely to the adequately measured impact of the exile on Judah as a state. Birch and Brueggemann (1999:319) state, 'In the sixth century B.C.E., there occurred a deep and irreversible disruption in the life of ancient Israel.' Aberbach (2001:216) highlights that the exile was more of a theological than a historical matter to the Jews as the theological difficulty of the Jews was 'exile and loss of national identity.' Klein (1979:10-11) magnifies the theological devastation of the Judeans because of the exile. The author (1979:10-11) further says that the theologically more destruction occurred in the temple where the significant furniture and treasures were taken and regular feasts and the Sabbath observance were discontinued. The author (1979:9) also refers to the book of Lamentations, which bewails the 587 BCE loss of all the prestigious glory of Jerusalem as reality, and indicates further that this loss was truly experienced in Jerusalem and that it was not a mere construct of returnees. The devastation was not a story made up, but it was very real to the deportees and the remnant. Smith (1989:32) leans on archaeological discoveries to prove that the land was devastated, while Curtis (2003:301) considers the peasants that were left to do their hard work on vineyards and the book of Lamentations to emphasise that the land was left helpless. There is no doubt that the land of Judah was negatively affected by the destruction of 587 BCE.

The impact of the devastation was not only circumscribed to valuable and cherished yet replaceable things like the temple and palaces, but the governance or the epitome of Judah's statehood was deeply affected. Curtis (2003:300) indicates that the destruction affected the dynasty of David and the temple negatively and asserts, 'The loss of city and temple struck at the very heart of Judah's identity.' However, Barstad (1996:42) claims that 'with the great majority of the population still intact, life in Judah after 586 in all probability before long went on very much in the same way that it had done before the catastrophe.' Furthermore, the

writer (1996:43) argues that the displacement of the elite did not incapacitate the functionality of the society. The exile or captivity of Judah is recorded because of the disruption of cultic and royal services carried out by Babylonians to curtail rebellion. The impact of the exile meant that there was no structure left in Judah that could represent Judah in any way. However, the fact that some people remained in Judah does not mean that they had the tranquillity to establish governance and revive cultic practices and services. The biblical records (Ezra-Nehemiah) about the time of the return clearly indicate that there was no formal civil structure in place with which the returnees needed to negotiate, but the cultic practices had ceased as it is also recorded in the book of Lamentations. Of course, people might have continued to live in Judah, but not as they had lived before as a state. Nothing remained the same, but things deteriorated under the influence of the 'the people of the land', which was a diluted or adulterated community that was by far not the same as the pre-exilic community.

There is no dispute that some Judeans remained in the land during the exile. The people that remained could not restore the functionality of the capital city or Zion, the cultic centre. In fact, some Judeans that could have attempted to restore the destroyed institutions had fled to the Benjamin territory, Egypt and other neighbouring states in fear of Babylon. Who could have dared to restore anything to normal in view of the brutality of the Babylonians and the betrayal of neighbouring states? Birch and Brueggemann (1999:325) succinctly posit, 'Judah as identifiable state was swept away, victim of imperial ruthlessness.' Yamauchi (2003:206) draws from archaeological evidence and concludes that the devastation was so severe that 'only small, poor villages ...' remained. Indeed, all the embodiment of Judah as a state had been exiled or had gone out of Judah territory. This adequate measurement of the impact of the exile on Judah supports or informs the theological concept of the exile of Judah, which does not mean that all citizens of Judah were exiled.

In the early years after the return, the impact of the exile was still evident and it told the story of the severity of the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon. Knight (1977:233-234) seeks to explain the glitches experienced during the restoration by Jewry early in the Persian regime saying, 'If discontinuity must be the experience of any community, political or religious, then

the problem of what constitutes the true succession will always be present.’ With reference to the time of Zerubbabel’s leadership after the exile, Curtis (2003:304) says, ‘Perhaps it was at this time that Judah was renamed “Yehud,” an Aramaic form of the same name, to reflect its new status as a sub-province of the Persian Empire.’ All the time during the exile, there was virtually nothing significant called ‘Judah’. Even though Judaism as a religion and the Jews as a nation came into their own ideal land or space, Jerusalem, the poor peasants did not count as anything, since they had formulated nothing in about 50 years. Therefore, the arrival of returnees was a new beginning and a new centre with which the peasants had to connect in order to identify with the returnees. The measured impact of the exile on Judah helps to understand the theological concept of the exile, especially that it was not superficial in nature.

6.8.3 The condition of the remnant

It was beyond the strength of the remnant to break out of their predicament without any help from elsewhere. In their extraordinary hard circumstances, the disadvantaged and disempowered peasants could do nothing to restore the status of Judah. Gerstenberger (2002:209) describes the situation saying, ‘So the social structure of the Jewish communities in Palestine was village-like and parochial.’ According to Smith (1989:35), the poor people that had been left behind as vinedressers did leave some vestiges of existence in the land. However, the question of a viable existence needs better proof than evidence of burial sites and other minor traces of existence, even if they are indisputable. The farmers’ disposition cannot be clearly explained, since they were left in disarray subsequent to the assassination of Gedaliah, who had tried to motivate and encourage them during his short-lived leadership. In amazement, Ben Zvi (2010a:156) refers to the fact that the Benjaminites remained in their land, and yet the story emphasises ‘total exile, an empty land, and a (partial) return.’ The author (2010:159) wonders why the remnant in Judah and Benjaminites did not reject the story. However, the people who were left in the land accomplished nothing on the one hand; the returnees on the other hand were intent on rebuilding the temple and restoring the cult services. This contrast concurs with the argument that Judah was exiled at a theological level. Even though, according to the Bible, the Benjaminites were regarded as people who defected

to Babylon during battles against Babylon, some scholars harp on this fact to prove that Judah was not empty at all. Of course, if the significance of the exiled elite and its subsequent impact were to be ignored, the theological exile concept may not be understood. However, in view of the inability of the remnant to reconstruct all that was destroyed and to restore at least cultic services. Judah was indeed exiled since cultic and royal functions were not performed in Judah during the exile. The scope of reforms indicate that virtually all cultic services were utterly disrupted by the exile including a weekly Sabbath and other feasts (Ezra 3: 4-6 and Nehemiah 13: 15-16).

6.9 A theology of the exile

Way before the exile of the Babylonian era an exile theology existed. Levin (2010b:1) states, 'In the Old Testament itself, the Exile constitutes a theological concept, and is hence very more than the record of what may perhaps have taken place in the sixth century.' However, Judah before the exile cherished ideas that God will never forsake them and will never forget the covenant He made with their ancestors as enshrined in Deuteronomy 4:31. As a result, the possibility of the exile escaped their minds. Even in the build-up to the exile, the messages of Jeremiah, the prophet of the time, were rejected and disbelieved until there was no more remedy for Judah, according to 2 Chronicles 36:16. The exile could not be averted, but it would be the final punishment by God to chastise His people towards repentance.

6.9.1 From cause to effect

The exile was not like a periodical matter that was bound to come at a stipulated time, but it would come because of disapproved behaviour. It came as the result of something just as death came as the result of sin. Muller (2010b:220) indicates that the loss of land as it was experienced by the Canaanites would be experienced by Israelites if they disobeyed God. House (1998:538) portrays the punishment that God unleashed on the Judeans as redemptive in nature, with the element of eliminating the sin that caused the catastrophe. Muller (2010a:237) further detects the following: 'The apostasy results in the anger of Yahweh...This old motif in

the OT almost always shows in its background the events of 586 B.C.E.' The exile came as what would normally follow in the case of sin.

The exile as a theology was written in other texts even prior to the exile. However, it should be noted that, as outlined earlier, redaction criticism issues have been raised by some scholars that want to present the exile as something that was construed as an afterthought. The exile was not a new phenomenon only heard of, because it actually happened. House (1998:483) in writing about the book of Lamentations, refers to Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-28, which pre-empted the consequences of infidelity on the part of Israelites. The writer (1998:485) further indicates that punishment was chosen rather than blessings, according to Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-28. The writer (1998:534) refers to the mentioned texts when writing about the final chapter of 2 Chronicles. Klein (1979:25) and Kessler (2010:329) refer to Deuteronomy 28 when dealing with the exile because of sin. In fact, Deuteronomy 28-30 deals with the curses of disobedience in detail.

The passage from Deuteronomy 28-30 that deal with the exile with regard to the possible defeat of Judah by another nation are of critical importance. Deuteronomy 28:25 indicates that one of the curses that would follow disobedience would be that YHWH will orchestrate a victory against his people by another nation. This is in harmony with the record of 2 Chronicles 36:15-21, which emphasises that God used the Babylonians to defeat his people. Furthermore, Deuteronomy 28:49-57 accentuates that a nation would be brought by God from far away and that the people of God would not understand their language. That nation would have no pity on the young and old in killing them. The nation, among other things, would destroy other cities of the land of God's people. To this fact, archaeology testifies, as some cities like Lachish were destroyed. Furthermore, the fortification walls would be destroyed also, as the Babylonians actually did.

In Deuteronomy 28:62, it is indicated that the population would be severely affected to such an extent that only few people would remain. Deuteronomy 28:64 stipulates that the LORD would scatter the people to other nations, which happened through enforced and voluntary exile. The worship of other gods by God's people is also indicated, which happened especially in Egypt,

where other gods were worshiped under the pretext of appeasing them as the gods were believed to have caused the exile in their anger. Furthermore, Deuteronomy 28:65 says that the people would find no rest in the lands to which they would flee; Lamentations 1 attests to that fact. In Deuteronomy 30:1-5, it is explained that if the experience of living in foreign lands would lead to repentance, then the Lord would restore them to their land and make them to be more successful than their fathers. The exile and its eventual end was not necessarily a prophecy, but it was to be a consequence of disobedience as explained ahead of its occurrence.

6.9.2 The motif of the empty land

Scholars have viewed the theological concept of 'the empty land of Judah as a result of the exile' from different angles without arriving at a consensus. Levin (2010:2) hints at the relationship between the exile and Judaism in terms of the conception of Judaism and posits, 'Scholars are still looking for a convincing answer....' Furthermore, the writer (2010:2) says that the issue of the 'empty land' during the exile has received considerable attention; however, 'the riddle is still unsolved'. At least a consensus should be reached from a theological point of view, because the exile is more of a theological than a historical matter, since it had become part of theology before it became part of history as an event in the past.

Kessler (2010:314) regarding the empty land motif opines, 'Thus while it would be inaccurate to say that the land was "totally empty" it is not far from the mark to describe it as fractured and relatively emptied.' The author (2010:315) further hints at the view of hyperbolic expression. Kessler (2010:310) points out that the biblical books of Jeremiah, 2 Kings, Ezra and Nehemiah have been studied regarding the concept of the empty land of Judah during the exile and claims that the results of the study are that the emptiness concept serves an ideological purpose. Linville (2010b:290) comments thus: 'The end of the exile is a kind of new creation ... Pre-creation suggests a land unformed and void: empty.' The concept of the exile of Judah does not seek a philosophical solution, but a theological one. During the time of the divided monarchy, Israel (the northern kingdom) fell to the Assyrians. The people of Israel were exiled and new people were introduced into the north, which gave rise to the loathed Samaritans. The exile as a reality did not occur under the Babylonian Empire for the first time, but much earlier during

the Assyrian Empire, who could not destroy the southern kingdom to enforce the exile on them. Of course, the Babylonians did not deliberately introduce different peoples into the territory of Judah, but the infiltration of foreigners and some Samaritans who intermarried with the remnant virtually obliterated the Judean lifestyle as they amalgamated with the people of Judah, who were stripped of civil and cultic centres. It might have been gradual, but the essence and substance of being Judeans faded away. They abandoned their feasts and weekly Sabbath observances, which were only restored by the returnees.

Wöhrle (2010:202) claims, 'The priestly text reflects the situation that the returnees from the Babylonian exile came to an unempty land.' The writer (2010:202) goes on to argue that the land was occupied, but the returnees had to find ways to avoid mingling with them. Ben Zvi (2010a:157) also argues that the returnees obliterated the prevalence of those who had remained and as such rendered the land to have been empty. In a way, the history of the remnant was regarded to be non-existent and not considered at all. This is a perceived political slant to Judaism as a religion, which came to reoccupy its rightful place. If the relationship between the religion and politics of the Jews is not sufficient to explain the apparent exclusion of the remnant in the reform of their religion, probably the analogy of the baskets of figs will explain it better, when dealt with towards the end of this chapter (see 6.9.4 below).

Another explanation for the empty land motif is propagated by Ben Zvi (2010a:162), who explains that the empty land motif is reminiscent of the obliteration of the existence of Canaanites during the time of Joshua. Ben Zvi (2010b:172) further elucidates that the perception of Judah about the exile 'associated the return from Babylon with the Exodus from Egypt, and thus Babylonian exile with the stay in Egypt' The reason why Jacob and his family joined Joseph in Egypt differs from the reason for the exile during the Babylonian era. The departure from Egypt did not occur with the full blessing of the Egyptian Pharaoh, while the departure from Babylon was sanctioned by King Cyrus of Persia. This explanation of the empty land motif is far from theology, because the stay in Egypt was not exilic in nature, but more about survival and fulfilment of divine revelation.

6.9.3 Empty land not real

Subsequent to missing the point about the concept of Judah having been exiled during the Babylonian Empire, several conclusions have been made about the perceived emptiness of Judah. The Bible does not say the land remained empty; therefore, the perception of the empty land motif does not directly relate to the Bible, but either to Bible translations or interpreters. Among other things that are propagated are mythical and fictional expressions.

6.9.3.1 Empty land myth

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2002:944), among other definitions for the word 'myth', suggests a myth is 'a widely held but false belief... a fictitious person or thing... an exaggerated or idealised conception of a person or thing.' A myth, though implicitly regarded as untruthful, relates to the background of something that actually happened. It is true that Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylonians in 587 BCE, though the Bible does not say the land was literally emptied. The perception of the emptiness of Judah needs attention.

Kessler (2010:309) regards the understanding of the emptiness of *Yehud* during the exile as a fictitious presentation by the returnees in order to displace the remnant population during the exile. Furthermore, the writer (2010:310) says that the purpose of the returnees was to obtain 'social, political and ideological hegemony to the total exclusion of all others.' It is very interesting that the untruthful presentation of the situation during the exile period could be a ploy to obtain a superior position. If so, was it only narrated to the descendants of the remnant who were not informed of the exile or were some survivors actually aware of the concept? Another question would be who could then have written the book or poems currently called Lamentations? If the remnant had never raised arguments about the meaning of the exile of Judah, it might have been because they have understood it. The returned politicians of Judah did not need to brainwash other people to survive themselves, because Persia was behind the program of the restoration of the Jewish cult. However, the returnees never thought of considering those that had remained in Judah and they were determined to revive their religion and identity as a nation of God. Understandably, a program of reconciliation was not on their minds, since they had never had to deal with separation or conflict among their own people

before. The dilution of the remnant identity with Samaritans and other nationalities were obvious and glaring due to the lifestyle of the remnant at the time of the exiles' return. The returnees had no need of a psychological scheme to entrench their supremacy over the remnant.

Linville (2010a:300) attempts to make sense of the sentiment of the practically non-existent, but alleged emptiness of Judah during the exile, as some Bible or history students understand the Bible by saying, 'The historical is not exclusive of the mythic, rather, they coexist as different but not exclusive modes of thought.' The writer (2010:301) goes on to say, 'Sometimes we may find they complement one another, at other times they may be at odds.' Another expression that the author (2010:276) propagates is that religion can use 'myths, rituals and experiences' to come up with places and maps that are subject to their authority. Briefly, the idea is apparently that it is normal for religion to employ myths in order to archive a particular objective. In a way, the thoughts of religious fathers or founders liberally supersede the thoughts of the deity in question, or the deity is subject to the writers of the literature of the religion in question. There is no mythical justification for the exile of Judah with the destruction of Judah in 587 BCE. Truly, the religious and national identity and centres were exiled leaving the remnant with nothing to point at as the archetype of Judah.

6.9.3.2 *The exile fiction*

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2002:524) defines fiction as 'prose literature, especially novels, describing imaginary events and people ... a false belief or statement, accepted as true because such acceptance is considered expedient.' Pronouncing or labelling Bible writings as 'fiction' without indicating whether the context is also fiction appears to be finding a quick solution to an identified problem or total disbelief in what the Bible actually says. Levin (2010b:2) dares to say, 'The idea of "the empty land" is a fiction.' Is it a fiction as said by the writers of the Bible or the interpreters? The writer (2010:63) answers that 'under conditions in which the OT was passed down, we cannot exclude the possibility that it is precisely the facts which are fictitious.' Furthermore, the author (2010:84) in arguing about the utterances of Gedaliah about the 'King of Babylon' and the 'Chaldeans', purports that even in the book of

Jeremiah there are signs that the Bible literature was produced quite later than the time of the events; hence their information is 'fictitious' and all Judeans never fled to Egypt as reported by the Bible.

The fiction label given to biblical information sounds militant in nature. What would be the objective of fiction or imaginations in the Bible about a particular event that never happened? Expressions characterising biblical literature as fiction are more excruciating than expressions identifying it as myths. The land of Judah was robbed of its identity when the priestly and royal services were severely disrupted subsequent to the deportation of the elite from Judah to Babylon.

6.9.4 The analogy of figs

The line of demarcation regarding who is who among the Jews is drawn by a vision of a basket of very good figs likened to first figs and another of very bad figs that could not be eaten. This vision is recorded in Jeremiah 24. The interpretation of the vision presented by the guide (God) shows that there was hope for the exiles taken to Babylon by God or through his will, while doom waited for the remnant and exiles that chose to flee to Egypt and other lands. Of great significance is the indication that the exiles to Babylon would be watched over by God and that they would be spiritually edified with a view to a good future with their God back in their land; the rest, especially those in Jerusalem, would be penalised and scattered among other nations, with no good future in store for them. Interestingly, the vision was shown to Jeremiah prior to 587 BCE, when King Zedekiah of Judah was arrested and killed together with his sons. This is where the theological aspect of the exile becomes clear, because God showed Jeremiah, what He had done relating to the exile of Jehoiachin, what He would do to the remnant in Jerusalem and what He would do to the exiles, throughout and after the exile. Kessler (2010:317) says, 'The exiles to Babylon ... will be the objects of Yahweh's favour.' The author (2010:319) explains that the vision expressed the presence of God with the exiles in Babylon. The bad figs in this vision represent the insubordinate elite in Jerusalem, and not necessarily the Judeans of the entire land of Judah.

Levin (2010a:63) does not fully consider God as the source and guide through the vision in Jeremiah 24 and says, 'The most distinct programmatic text is the vision of the two baskets of figs in Jer 24.' The vision cannot be ignored when studying the theology of the exile as an event that occurred according to God's will and that God was in charge all the time, even when His temple was looted, destroyed and burnt. Kessler (2010:328) seemingly puzzled by the theological nature of the vision and the historical realities of what transpired throughout the exile period in Judah posits, 'Out of theological necessity no one is left in the land.' The land in question was Jerusalem, and not the whole territory, even though it may be difficult for many Bible students to comprehend the scope of affairs that pertain to the exile. Idolatry and other sins that were deemed to be without remedy by God were either committed or allowed by the people in control of the cultic and royal systems. Had it not been for the compromising or permissive behaviour of the people, the exile would have not occurred.

Another view of the vision is presented by Leuchter (2008:132) who refers to the determination of the Jews who emigrated to Egypt to worship the so-called Queen of Heaven at the expense of God. The author indicates that the vision was a response of God to the obstinate Judeans who were bent on trusting Egypt for survival to the point of fleeing there. The author (2008:132) remarks, 'They have chosen to eliminate YHWH from their religious world, and YHWH answers in kind, essentially disowning the community.' The poor vinedressers, the Benjaminites and citizens of other cities remained in the territory of Judah. The spotlight during the experience of the exile was on Jerusalem and not the rest of the land of Judah. The returnees came to reoccupy Jerusalem, not the other areas. Judah's heart was unplugged for repair during the exile, to be restored only after the exile. At the time of the return, not the whole Golah community returned. Only members of the Golah community who were somehow inspired went on the long journey and returned to a destroyed and unknown land. It can be accepted that God was in charge in selecting the people who were truly committed to Him or who were responsive to God's biddings even during the exile. Almost nothing enters the mind of a human being because of his own desires; therefore, God was in charge of the returnees all the way. The exile is a theological matter and not a statistical or historical matter per se.

Though the exile actually occurred, it happened with God wielding authority over the affairs of the Judeans of the time.

6.10 Summary

The exile concept is theological in nature and it relates to the political and historical situation of the country of Judah, especially during the time just prior to the exile and immediately after the exile. The exile theology originates in the time before the actual exile as Judah experienced it, but after the exile of the northern monarchy of Israel. The wording of 2 Chronicles 36:15-21 relates to the passages on the exile concept in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Some scholars believe that expressions referring to the exile concept in the Torah were added around the time of the exile, since it is also believed that the Old Testament literature was only put in writing since the time of the exile. The audience of the Pentateuch is construed as the exilic or post-exilic community of Judah, an assertion that is not easy to accept, because it excludes Israel (the north) from the picture. The belief that the Torah was only written during the exile is not convincing, since some written document was found in the temple during the reign of Josiah. The possibilities of exile in the Torah were not created around the exile, but the authors of the book of 2 Chronicles' drew their information from the Torah in writing the book, as the book itself refers to other sources. It is possible that the writers of Chronicles could have sought to explain the tragedy of the exile by referring to the Torah. The exile was indeed a tragedy, but not an accident befalling the nation of Judah. God announced it even through his prophet Jeremiah when it was imminent. The exilic calamity is projected as a consequence of disobedience in the Torah; in 2 Chronicles, it is told as an event that had occurred. The nation of Judah had to make sense of it by exploring all means, including revisiting the Torah. The anachronistic and redaction criticism issues about the Torah and 2 Chronicles 36 offer inadequate explanations that seek to '*historicize*' theology, probably as prompted by the way contemporary historical criticism treats biblical information. The Bible writers that write about the exile of Judah focus on Jerusalem and not the whole territory inclusive of the territory of Benjamin. The designation 'Judah', in the context of the exile, theologically represented the

concept of the leadership of Judah in Jerusalem, and not the comprehensive concept of the exile of the citizenship of Judah.

The relationship between history and theology is of critical importance in the Bible. In fact, if the book of Chronicles is well understood, the historical sources of Israel and Judah that it refers to had existed separately and were not originally part of the Bible since the book of Chronicles itself refers to them. Selected historical events in the Bible serve as contexts or backgrounds for historical facts; or, historical rectitude is not a prerequisite for theology to be accepted. Inasmuch as the gospels do not contain every word and all the works of Jesus, so the Old Testament does not necessarily contain all historical details of Israel or Judah. The objective of biblical literature is theological in nature as opposed to literature recording history. Theological clarity should be obtained before historical details are put into their sequence. It is accepted that all recorded history is characterised by selective writing about events, and that an element of selective interpretation will always be present. That entails that no history will be perfect. In the same vein, some historical imperfections may be conceded in respect of theology. However, there is an essential difference in the subject matter of these disciplines. Theology can reveal future events, while history is primarily concerned with events that have already occurred. Furthermore, theology studies events to reveal God's role in them, in that way contributing to a biblical perspective on history. History might study events with a blind eye for God's role in any event, thereby making no significant contribution to theology. Therefore, in studying any biblical account, theology is primary and history is secondary. The exile of Judah in the Bible is a theological concept that is not dependent on historical accuracy.

The mythical and fictional expressions about the exile concept are reasoning from the conclusions or perceptions of Bible students from other schools or from the minimalist approach. They may even be personal perceptions. The Bible does not say no person remained in Judah. The poor remained in Judah, while the exiles to Babylon had the presence of God with them, and those who fled to other countries like Egypt had no good future according to divine revelations in Jeremiah 24 (the vision of two baskets of good and bad figs).

The understanding of the biblical concept of the exile of Judah or the expression, 'Judah went into exile', is paramount. No biblical text says that Judah was left empty because of the exile. The so-called 'emptiness of Judah' or *tabula rasa*, which has been labelled as a myth or fiction, is not a biblical expression at all, but an interpretation of the exile of Judah. Historically Judah was never left empty. Theologically Judah's state and cultic services were conceptually exiled as opposed to the whole population being taken out of Judah. The exile of Judah according to the Bible was the destruction of the capital city, Jerusalem, which had been the centre of cultic and royal activities, thus rendering Judah identity to be non-existent in Judah. Moreover, there was fear to revive Judean customs and practices, because the Babylonians would deem such an action as rebellion. Furthermore, disobedience to God under the royal and cultic leadership developed to irreparable proportions and was the ultimate cause of the exile. Jerusalem, which largely represented what Judah was as a nation, is the focal point in the concept of the exile of Judah. The exile of Judah was God-ordained or indirectly God-executed through the Babylonian Empire; thus, by its very nature, it makes the exile of Judah not a historical concept, but rather a theological concept.

6.11 Conclusion

Theologically, the exile would come as a penalty due to the disobedience of Israel and Judah. When no other remedy was left to curb Judah's rebellion, God used Babylon to carry out the exile. The exile is concerned with the work of God rather than with historical events or records. Kessler (2010:330) in commenting on the emptiness of Judah, according to 2 Kings 25, indicates that the exile of the whole elite may mean that the elite represented all Judeans; thus, Judah without its elite justifies the concept of the emptiness of Judah. If this had not been the case, God could have eradicated sin and rebellion by using the elite (royal and cultic) at religious and civil levels. Therefore, without the elite, there was no Judah in the land of Judah, and the time had come that every person could do as he pleased to do, as in the time of the Judges.

Chapter 7

Finding harmony between history writing and theology writing

7.1 Introduction

The exile of Judah affected the cultic and political life of the people of Judah, who were a union of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. The configuration of the nation of God changed from time to time subsequent to the division of the monarchy after the reign of Solomon. Idolatry seems to have been the main cause of the rapid deterioration of the nation of God from the time of Solomon to the time of the exile. Though the politics of Judah were adversely affected by the exile, the cause of the exile was primarily the divinely decreed infidelity of Judah and secondarily, the last kings of Judah after King Josiah that made unfortunate decisions by making pacts with some nations contrary to exhortative messages of prophets of God like Jeremiah. Suffice it to say the exile of Judah, though tragic in nature, was not an accident but the culmination of a deteriorating relationship between God and the nation of Judah.

Judaism emerged and developed during the exile in Babylon. When the exiles returned to Judah for reconstruction, revival and restoration purposes, they were religiously a different people. Some scholars see it as a scheme of the returnees to disassociate themselves from the Jews that remained in Judah. The Bible (cf. Ezra 4:1-4) and Ahlstrom (1994:822) report that the returnees were not very accommodative of the people of the land whom they found in the area of Judah after the exile. However, similarly, the people that remained in Judah regarded the returnees as strangers (see 1.2 above). It appears that a number of the people that remained in Judah did not anticipate a return of exiles. The underlying factor that caused both the returnees and the people of the land to view each other as people of divergent identity was religious in nature particularly the returnees.

Tomasino (2003:48-49) points out that Judaism, which emerged in Babylon in the circles of the Judean exiles, was different from Yahwism, which had deteriorated irreparably. According to Mayes (1989:85), subscription to Judaism was based on the individual adoption of a particular

code of morality and ethics precluding entitlement by birth. There was no Judaism in Judah during the exile (see 1.2 above). People of the land that were brought into the land by Esarhadon, King of Assyria, claimed to be practising the religion of Judah, but they did not know that the returned exiles were practicing a different religion called Judaism, which did not have the defects of the Yahwism probably known to them. The fact that the so-called the people of the land, who claimed to have come into the land during the Assyrian regime, were seeing no difference between Israel and Judah shows that the exilic religious status quo in Judah was of very poor quality, if not non-existent.

The relevant questions are what did God mean by imposing an exile and which group did He favour? Ahlstrom (1994:847) indicates that texts like Ezekiel 11:15-21; 33:24-34; and Jeremiah 24 might have escalated the hostility between the remnant and the returnees. Ezekiel 11:15-21 promises a return to the exiles, who were in various lands. The presence of God as a 'little sanctuary' is also promised by God to the exiles. God will remove their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. When the exiles return, they will remove detestable and abominable practices in Judah. There seems to be no promise to those that remained in Judah. The exiles are favoured to become the people of God after the exile, and therefore God will be their God. At the core, this is a religious relationship. Furthermore, Ezekiel 33:24-33 says the Judeans that remained in Judah purported to be the rightful owners of the land after Abraham. God disputes their claims and mentions their sins such as idolatry, adultery and violence, which disqualify them from owning the land. God promises disasters and says they will fall by the sword, die of the pestilence and be devoured by wild animals. The Judeans are presented as people that hear, but do not act in accordance with what they hear. This text is essentially about doom for those that remained in Judah. Jeremiah 24 is in harmony with the former text, Ezekiel 11, which presents the exiles as the favoured people, because they have God as their little sanctuary. The exiles are portrayed as good figs, while those that remained are like bad figs that cannot be eaten. The exiles will be given a new heart and restored to Judah, but those that remained will suffer from the sword, famine and pestilence. There is no hope for those that remained and those that had fled to Egypt.

God meant to give the exiles a new heart of flesh or to convert them to renounce the idolatrous abominations that were practised in Judah. The remnant was denounced by God for the abominations, while the exiles would be favoured with the presence of God as a little sanctuary to them. The exiles would be returned to Judah by God in the fullness of time, according to the above-mentioned texts in the books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. God revealed Himself in exile (Babylon), according to the record of the book of Daniel. Thus, God rejected the diluted Yahwism in Judah and became involved in establishing Judaism, with a redemptive objective. God, who advised the Judeans to submit to Babylon in order to live, knew the restorative consequences of surrendering to Babylon (cf. Jer 21:9). The plan of God was to revive their religion in exile and restore them when they would be worthy to occupy the land. The exile to Babylon was the recommended choice, since God would edify His people in Babylon. Furthermore, those that chose to return leaving others in Babylon were inspired by God to return to Judah (Ezra 1:5). They were the real remnant of Judah, for they were responsive to the biddings of God. The nation of Judah did not separate itself during exile, but it was the work of God in them as individuals .

For the sake of balance in this research, the expression of the exile of Judah or exile of survivors is drawn from an exilic source, Lamentations, and a post-exilic source, Chronicles. The purpose of using Lamentations 1:1-4 and 2 Chronicles 36:15-21 is to prove that the concept of the exile of Judah was not construed only after the exile, but that it was accepted even during the exile. In fact, this concept is a pre-exilic expression of God (cf. Lev 26). Thus, the notion that the exile of Judah originated in Golah Judaism is dispelled by the book of Lamentations and Leviticus 26.

That the concept of the exile of Judah referred to the exile of the elite in Jerusalem was accepted and expressed by the authors of Lamentations, who had remained in Jerusalem. Lamentations 1:3 must not be understood to mean that literally all of Judah went into exile when it says, 'Judah went captive'; the meaning is theological and qualitative in view of the significance of the exiles. The returnees affirmed (in the book of Chronicles) the concept that was written (in the book of Lamentation) by the people that remained in Jerusalem.

The focal point of the exile of Judah is Jerusalem, and the exilic and post-exilic Bible authors write about the concept, focussing on Jerusalem. Lamentations 1:1 refers to the city that is desolate in harmony with Jeremiah 26:9; 27:17, while 2 Chronicles 36:19 refers to the burning of God's house and all the palaces, and the destruction of the walls of the city of Jerusalem. Furthermore, Jeremiah 32:31 and 19:15 portray the people of the city to have been stiff-necked and accuse them of provoking God. God found wickedness in the prophets and priests of his house, which was in Jerusalem. Thus, God hid his face from the city (Jer 33:5) and set his face against the city (Jer 21:10). The city of Jerusalem was to be burnt with fire (Jer 34:2, 22; 37:8, 10; 38:23). The sword, pestilence and famine were intended for those that remained in the city (Jer 38:2). In Jeremiah 17:26-27, which contains the message of God about keeping the Sabbath holy and carrying no burdens on it, Jerusalem is presented as the city to which people would come from the whole land of Judah for religious purposes and the throne of David would always be occupied. Disregarding the Sabbath, among other things, would bring about the exile of Judah, which would result in the lack of a monarch and the cessation of sacrificial rites in Jerusalem. The historical record of Jeremiah 39:9-10 is more precise by emphasizing the focal point of the exile thus:

'Then Nebuzaradan the chief of the executioners deported to Babylon the rest of the people who remained in the city, and those who fell away, who fell to him with the rest of the people who remained. But Nebuzaradan, the chief of the executioners, left some of the poor people, who had not a thing belonging to them, in the land of Judah, and gave to them vineyards and fields on that day.'

Thus, Jerusalem as the focal point of Lamentations 1:1 and 2 Chronicles 36:19 is such an important city that Judah is virtually non-existent without its functionality .

The exilic book of Lamentations is in harmony with the post-exilic books of Chronicles and Kings about the exile of Judah. Therefore, the concept was not a construct of the returnees to displace the remnant, for even the remnant in Jerusalem expressed the concept during the exile.

The exile of Judah seems to be a theological concept as opposed to a factional concept, since both in Judah and in Babylon, during and after the exile, the concept was similarly understood. It has been shown in this thesis that the concept of the exile of Judah was already present in pre-exilic times. The exile was imminent to befall the nation of Judah because of their life-style in the pre-exilic era (see 1.2 above). According to Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, there would be disastrous consequences if disobedience should exist and go unabated. In 2 Chronicles 36:16 and Jeremiah 44:3-6, it is stated that there was no more remedy for the disobedience. Thus, the projected consequences of disobedience could not be withheld, but were unleashed due to the practice of idolatry in Judah.

Therefore, to the general nation of Judah, the concept of the exile of Judah is neither fallacious nor divisive, but a reality that actually occurred throughout the Babylonian hegemony, until Judah was restored after the fall of Babylon. Connotations of literal emptiness or total desolation and depopulation are not detected in the understanding of either the remnant or returnees before, during or after the exile. However, the impact of the exile on Judah was understood to have been of catastrophic proportions. Thus, to the remnant in Judah during the exile and returnees after the exile the meaning of the exile was that the exile of Judah became a reality when all normal business in the capital city had been brought to an end. The Judah referred to in the concept of the exile of Judah is the nation and not individual citizens. There was no leadership for those that remained, and establishing any form of leadership could be deemed as rebellion at that time. Judah was exiled as a national entity.

Albertz (2002:111) goes to the heart of the emptiness of Judah, namely the looting, destruction and arson of the Holy of Holies in the sanctuary. God did not reveal Himself in the sanctuary in Jerusalem, because He had abandoned it. A particular golden mark was made to symbolise the presence of God who had actually forsaken it. The covenant ark and its important contents were not there anymore (see 1.5 above). God chose to be a 'little sanctuary' among the exiles in Babylon. Not only were the exiles gone from Jerusalem, but also God departed leaving Jerusalem desolate of divine presence. The emptiness of Judah was not a literal removal of all residents, but a theological matter comprising that God left with the exiles to prepare them for

new beginnings. Most of the elite that used to take the lead in cultic circles were either executed or exiled. Thus, there was an obvious void in Jerusalem, especially in cultic circles.

The authors of the Bible that wrote about the exile of Judah from a theological point of view and their addressees during and after the exile had no qualms about the concept. Lamentations 1:3, in the face of the exile, clearly says, 'Judah went captive' This expression is echoed in the context of explaining how Jerusalem was marred by the exile. What happened to Jerusalem had repercussions for the whole nation of Judah. In Judah, there was no king and no rituals. The substance of what set Judah apart as a nation was exiled, rendering Judah as an exiled nation, though not from a quantitative point of view. The text of 2 Chronicles 36:20 clearly says that those that escaped the sword were taken into captivity. If this verse is read out of context, it could be construed to mean all persons were exiled from the land. However, Jeremiah 38:2 indicates that the sword, pestilence and famine were determined for those that remained in the city of Jerusalem. The focal point of 2 Chronicles 36:20 is Jerusalem, which was the centre of the substance of Judah as a nation. Remarkably, the sword was used to kill specifically in Jerusalem. The book of 2 Kings 25:21 says, 'and he exiled Judah from its land.' The executions of the clergy under the sway of Babylon meant Judah was taken out of the land as a nation. No legitimate cultic officers were left, as some of them were taken to Babylon together with royal servants or the rest of the elite. Everything that held Judah together was taken out of Judah. Jeremiah 13:19 says, '... Judah has been exiled; all of it has been peacefully exiled.' Furthermore, Jeremiah 52:27 says, '...And Judah was exiled from off his land.' The Judeans in Judah could not stand up to the requirements of a nation during the exile, because those that should have rightfully stood up for Judah were carried away into captivity. None of those left could represent or lead Judah in Judah during the exile. In Judah during the exile, there was no military, law enforcement, cultic practices, trade or functional capital city. Clearly, a nation that lacked all these amenities was non-existent. All those that remained in Judah were just individuals and not a nation as such.

7.2 The pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic land of Judah

The land of Judah was not unscathed by the catastrophic exile. It had an adverse impact on the population of Judah because of the execution, deportation and emigration of a large number of its citizens. Moreover, the borders of the land of Judah were vulnerable because of the lack of governance and military services in Judah (see 2.3.4.2 above).

The original land of Judah stretched from Beersheba to somewhere close to Jebus (later called 'Jerusalem') before the reign of King David. As discussed in the relevant section (see 2.3.1 above) the territory of Judah, excluding the territory of Benjamin, was inhabited by some Levites, the Simeon tribe and the Judah tribe during the time of settlement. During the period of the united monarchy under King Saul, King David and King Solomon, the land of Judah experienced different influences. During the days of King Saul, the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Philistines and Amalekites were defeated, thus keeping the borders of Judah intact. King David managed to extend the borders of Judah by defeating the Jebusites and taking their land, which was then called Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel and later of Judah. King Solomon's reign was peaceful, first because of the fear that nearby states had felt for his father David, and second, because of Solomon's intermarriages with neighbouring states. Thus, the borders of Judah remained intact during his reign (see 2.3.2 above).

With the division of the monarchy of Israel after the reign of King Solomon, the tribe of Benjamin became part of Judah. The size of the land of Judah was decreased after the division of the Israelite monarchy. In 701 BCE, the Assyrians managed to destroy 46 towns of Judah and numerous villages (Faust, 2008:168); thus, the territory of Judah was further reduced. Nevertheless, according to Grabbe (2007:218-220), the lost territory was recovered by King Josiah before his premature death. When the northern state of Israel became independent from the south, the south was called Judah, embracing the tribes of Benjamin and Simeon, and some Levites. The territory of Benjamin was contested for a while between the north and the south. To Judah, the Benjamin territory served as a buffer zone (see 2.3.3.2 above). The Simeon tribe was totally swallowed by Judah and never emerged again as a different tribe. Comparing the south to the north, the south was weaker (Miller and Hayes, 1986:233). However, the south

was stable in terms of royal succession practices, while succession practices in the north were unpredictable because king's sons would not necessarily succeed their fathers (Finkelstein & Mazar, 2007:151; Soggin, 1993:201). Bright (2000:236) is of the opinion that Judah formed a closer unity and points out that it was not exposed to foreign influences like the north was. Furthermore, Finkelstein & Mazar (2007:152-154) explain that the population of Judah grew tremendously. Due to the defeat of the north by Assyria in 722 BCE, some Israelites fled to Judah to avoid deportation (see 2.3.3.4.above). During the reign of Josiah, the borders of Judah were relatively expanded. Unfortunately, this ended with his unexpected death wrought by the Egyptian troops.

After the destruction of Judah by Babylon, Judah became a province along the Dead Sea. It was about 25 miles from south to north, and 30 miles from east to west (see 2.2.2 above) The actual borders of Judah, as explained in the books of Joshua and Judges, are controvertible. However, the fact that Judah settled in the area west of the Dead Sea is not disputed. The borders of Judah were fluid during the exile. A larger part of the south of Judah was taken by Edom (see 2.3.4.2 above). The destruction of Jerusalem, the capital city, disrupted the state and cult of Judah and left the land 'heartless' and in disarray. However, not all cities of Judah were destroyed (see 2.3.4.4 above) At least, there were towns that belonged to Judah during the exile such as Jerusalem, Gezer and Beth-zur. The map on page 21 (see Map 2 above) illustrates that Lachish was outside the province of Judah during the exile.

Early in the Persian era, Judah was known as the Province of Yehud, at least not just as the province 'beyond the river'. It was probably incorporated into the territory of Samaria (see 2.3.5 above). The land of Judah had been reduced to such an extent that it could not match the length of the Dead Sea as presented on the maps, 3 and 4 (see 2.3.5.2 above) The issue of the land or territory of Benjamin as part of Judah must also be taken into account. Apparently, with capitulation to Babylon, Benjamin inadvertently fell out of the union of the southern kingdom. The land of Judah around the exilic period did not include the territory or tribe of Benjamin explicitly and conscientiously (see 2.3.6 above).

Therefore, the land of Judah shrunk at all borders and became smaller, but it was never taken by another nation and renamed. However, the name 'Yehud' was used during the exile as an Aramaic expression for the name Judah. Some Judeans remained in the land of Judah, which had no administrative centre or government other than Babylon itself throughout the exile. Whether Judah was part of the province called 'beyond the river' (Euphrates) is a disputed subject, since there is hardly concrete evidence for it ever being part of that province. The land of Judah was not emptied of all its citizens, but it was emptied of governance and all its necessary amenities like defence, safety, justice and trade. The cult was also disrupted, thus exposing the remnant to moral and identity dilution.

7.3 The introductory study of Lamentations, Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah

The Bible in Lamentations 1:3 and 2 Chronicles 36:20 says that Judah went into exile and those who escaped the sword were exiled. The book or books of Ezra-Nehemiah have some information about the restoration of Judah during the Persian period. They have been studied in their context to enhance a better understanding of their messages. In addition, it has been noted that there are other biblical texts that refer to the concept of the exile of Judah, namely 2 Kings 25:21, which says, 'and he exiled Judah from its land'; and Jeremiah 52:27, which says, 'and Judah was exiled from off his land'.

The book of Chronicles is the last book in the section Writings of the Hebrew Bible canon. The book is actually entitled, *dibre hayyammim*, which means, 'the words of the days', as opposed to the meaning, 'the events of the days' (see 3.2.2 above). The book looks like a commentary that is largely theology writing as opposed to history writing (see 3.2.3.2 above). It was written for a post-exilic audience that was probably aware of the availability of other historical sources. Hamilton (2001:484) points out that the genealogy of the tribe of Judah is presented before the genealogies of other tribes, thus signifying that the audience of the book was primarily composed of Jews. Boshoff (2005:5) and Dillard & Longman (1994:173) acknowledge the historical nature of the book of Chronicles, which was meant for a unique audience not long

after the time of the return. This idea differs from the view of Jonker (2006:866) that the secondary audience of the book was the community of the late Persian era. Jonker (2006:866) highlights that the reference to Saul, the first king of Israel, is intended to assimilate the Benjamin tribe into the returnee community of the Jews. Identifying the primary audience as an actual audience from the early Persian era is relevant. The book is geared to reformative theology writing that is historically selective and overtly refers to other historical sources with more details. The history selected by the author/-s of the book is used as a context for the revelations of God's will, which constitute theology.

The book of Chronicles is more relevant in dealing with the theological concept of the exile of Judah, because it is theological in nature. The book implicitly concedes that it is not a detailed historical source, as it refers to other historical sources that have more details. The selected historical accounts seem to serve as a background and context of the theological messages of the book. Furthermore, the fact that the book of Chronicles was written in Levitical realms, according to Boshoff (2005:8) and Hayes (2004:121), places emphasis on Jerusalem as the focal point of the concept of the exile of Judah. The book of Chronicles indicates that the survivors of the sword were carried away into captivity. The significance of the elite being exiled constituted the substance of all what Judah was. In the first place, Israel occupied the Promised Land without necessarily destroying all nations that inhabited the land prior to their coming; hence, there were persons like Uriah, the Hittite, who was part of Judah. Therefore, the exile of Judah would not mean a total destruction and depopulation of all Judeans throughout Judah. The exile of Judah is not a statistical statement or concept, but a qualitative statement from a theological point of view.

The book of Chronicles was not written as a purely historical source, but largely for edification purposes in a reformative and restorative context. That the book of Chronicles was written as a theological source, is verified by the fact that a number of other historical sources were available at the time of its writing (see 3.2.7 above).

The book of Ezra-Nehemiah, which in the Hebrew canon is entitled 'Ezra' and is positioned just before the book of Chronicles, deals mainly with the return of exiles and the reconstruction of

the temple and city walls in the Persian era. It is clear that the book of Ezra-Nehemiah was intended to preserve information drawn from various sources regarding the revival and restoration of Judah (see 3.3.4. above). A traditional belief that Ezra wrote both the book of Chronicles and Ezra suggests the books are related. However, the notion of common authorship is disputed (see 3.3.5.3 above). Like the book of Chronicles, the book of Ezra-Nehemiah addresses a post-exilic audience involved in restoration work. It is noteworthy that the information preserved with the compilation of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah does not present the land of Judah to have been found empty of residents when returnees arrived in the land.

The book of Lamentations, originally not given a title, is a compilation of five poems clearly composed during the exile. No particular poet can be identified as the author of the book. The poems, as opposed to the books of Chronicles, Kings and Ezra-Nehemiah, do not refer to the exile as an event in the past, but as an on-going event described by the expression, 'Judah went captive'. The remnant in Jerusalem used the expression to show that this theological expression does not concern a historical or statistical report. If other biblical books that appear historical in nature raise questions of historical rectitude on the exile of Judah, then the poems of lament, due to their exilic origin, should help the student to recognise that this is a theological concept rather than a historical concept.

Therefore, the concept of the exile of Judah was not a post-exilic construct for political and religious reasons, for even during the exile it was an acceptable concept with theological meaning. It denoted a fulfilment of what God had earlier projected or expressed as a possibility in the event of unfaithfulness to God going unabated. Such a phenomenon had occurred with the northern kingdom earlier under the power of Assyrians, who displaced or replaced Israel citizens with other people of different nationalities. In 2 Chronicles 34:5, 6, 9, the extensive reforms of Josiah seem to have reached the area of the northern kingdom, which still had an Israelite remnant. In Jeremiah 41:5, it is indicated that some people came from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria with offerings to the temple, and some of them were killed by Ishmael who had assassinated Gedaliah. These texts indicate that even the well-accepted notion that the Assyrians displaced all Israelites is questionable, since there is a clear reference to a genuine

remnant of Israelites in those areas. The exile of Israel and Judah were not statistical accounts in nature.

The exile had ended when the book of Chronicles was composed and written, and the community of Jerusalem was inclusive of returnees and those of the remnant that joined the returnees. Yet, there is no dispute about the idea of the exile of Judah in the expression of the concept of the exile of Judah in the community. The lack of qualifying statements in the expression of the concept of the exile of Judah indicates that the concept was in no way a sensitive subject, but a mutually accepted concept. Thus, there is a thematic unity regarding the concept of the exile of Judah in the exilic book of Lamentations and the post-exilic book of Chronicles. The concept of the exile of Judah straddles the line that marks the end of the exile. This theological concept belongs to both sides of the demarcating line of the exilic and the post-exilic eras.

7.4 Historical study of pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic Judah

The land of Judah could not have its own history as if it were an independent island. Already in the time of Samuel, the nation of Israel desired to have a monarchy, which had not been the plan of God for his people at the time of their arrival in the Promised Land (cf. 1 Sam 8:5-22). Their request for a king was the result of the widespread influence of the neighbouring countries and their kings. God gave Israel their king. After the division of the kingdom of Israel into the northern kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah in the south, Judah had its own kings. Unfortunately, the history of the Judeans throughout the pre-exilic era was largely influenced by their kings, who conformed to the practices of other surrounding kings, especially in respect of entering into alliances with other nations.

It is remarkable that throughout the hegemony of the Assyrians, who exterminated the northern monarchy of Israel, the nation of Judah prevailed due to the protective power of God, even though parts of the land of Judah were lost to the Assyrians. However, with the demise of Assyria from 612 BCE to 609 BCE, the decline of the state of Judah started. The weakening of the kingdom of Judah was signalled by the death of King Josiah, who died at the hands of the

Egyptian troops en route to Megiddo in an effort to support the Assyrians against the rising Babylonians, Josiah attempted to thwart the Egyptians on their way to attack Babylon. While Judah was under the sway of Egypt, Babylon was rising in power and wanted to increase its Empire. Egypt and Babylon were in a fierce contest for the land of Syria and Palestine. The vision of Josiah to raise the united monarchy perished with his death (see 4.3.2 above). Egypt managed to influence Judah repeatedly to rebel against Babylon. The result of this influence led to the fall of Judah (see 4.3.6 above).

The actual fall of Judah under the rule of Zedekiah in 588 BCE was a disaster. The support of Egypt in the war against Babylon, which lasted for about 18 months, was not sustained. Judah was left alone defending only its capital city, Jerusalem, where its cultic and political elite was centred. Judah lost its royal servants, its clerical services, its economy, its military and judicial system due to executions in the war, the flight or emigration to nearby nations and the exile of part of the elite to Babylon. The fall of Judah and its aftermath was tremendous (see 4.4.3 above). With the inception of the exilic period, came a vast depopulation. The population concerned was largely that of Jerusalem, where virtually all systems and governance structures were based. Although the destruction was comprehensive, it was not a total destruction. It is important to realise that Judah was not void of inhabitants. It is estimated that about two-thirds of the population had gone from Jerusalem (see 4.4.6 above). Historically, total depopulation never occurred.

Early in the exilic period, Judah was given a lifeline when Gedaliah was appointed as governor of Judah by Babylon. The royal genealogy was not considered with his appointment. Loyalty was the main criterion applied by the Babylonians, since Gedaliah did not favour the idea of trusting Egypt against Babylon. The appointment of Gedaliah would be the final attempt of the Babylonians to recognise Judah as a political entity, with Mizpah as the capital city. This kind of governance structure was meant for the poor people that had been left in the territory of Judah. Unfortunately, Gedaliah was assassinated by the Ishmael conspiracy, which had been mobilised in Ammon. The murder of Gedaliah in 582 BCE could have triggered the final deportation of the Judeans, and at the same time, generated a great fear of Babylon. Thus,

many more Judeans fled to Egypt and other neighbouring states. The population was further depleted and there was no more corporate Judah (see 4.5.1.2 above). Probably, Judah was incorporated into the province of Samaria. History is silent on governance structure in Judah after Gedaliah's death. Baly (1976:190) explains that the remnant had some relative economic liberty, but 'what they were certainly not free to do was to organise politically, for this would have been construed by the authorities as rebellion.' Judah had shot itself in the foot as a political entity and it was left in limbo until the end of the Babylonian hegemony. More than ten thousands of Judeans were deported to Babylon. As for those who fled to other countries, history is silent on their number. The number of those executed is also unknown.

Religiously, Judah was dispersed into the Golah, the Elephantine and the remnant communities, according to historical data. According to Kaiser (1998:425), the spiritual core moved to Babylon, and Betlyon (2005:7) and Blenkinsopp (2009:2) emphasise that the new religion that developed in Babylon was different from Yahwism in terms of placing more emphasis on reading and ritual developments. In Judah, where some Judeans remained, religious lament was a major part of the cult (Miller and Hayes, 1986:426); hence, the composition of the book of Lamentations. The site of the destroyed temple was used by those that wished to do so. However, Beek (1963:128) refers to Ezekiel, who was shown sun worshippers in the temple area. Syncretism continued in Judah. The Elephantine Judeans continued to practice idolatry, according to Rogerson and Davies (1989:171), Fohrer (1973:333) and Leuchter (2008:132). The Judeans that fled to the other neighbouring states never seem to have mobilised themselves into any structure that took action. Nor did they assume religious positions that are documented in the Bible or other historical sources. The Golah community reformed relatively, while the remnant and the Elephantine communities became more syncretistic (see 4.5.3.2 above).

The remnant, according to Nichol *ed.* (1976c:443), did not fare well compared to the Babylonian exiles, which is in harmony with Jeremiah 24:8. Normally, a society without a strong religion, governance and judiciary would degenerate morally and otherwise to the point of losing its identity. The Judeans were exposed to virtually all kinds of influences of peoples from

the nearby states (see 4.5.4.2 above). Murphy (2002:62) indicates that some of these peoples actually infiltrated Judah and were not happy when the exiles returned. The disposition of the people in Judah in the exilic era is not well documented, not even in the Bible. What transpired in Judah during the exile has become a matter of belief and speculation. It has been stated that the history of Judah in Judah during the exile was temporarily halted (see 4.5.4.3 above). Due to the infiltration of foreigners into the land of Judah during the exilic period, the Judean identity, organisationally and in terms of culture and principles, was forced out of Judah, thus further stressing the fact that Judah was exiled.

The long awaited fall of Babylon eventually came in 539 BCE. Because of the fall of Babylon, the Persian Empire was established over Judah. Cyrus cancelled the deportation system, and thus the Jews were allowed to go and rebuild their temple in Jerusalem (see 4.7 above). The return to Jerusalem was aimed at religious liberty, but not political freedom.

In total, more than 49 thousands Jews actually returned to Jerusalem. The number of returnees did not equal the number of the Jews that resided in Babylon, since some of them remained in Babylon. The number of the returnees brings to mind the number of the deportees, which were around 11577. Grabbe (2006:274) and Becking (1998:163) regard the number of the returnees as a myth. Lipschits (2005:372) disputes the number, citing a lack of archaeological evidence that would indicate such a growth in population in Jerusalem around the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. The texts of Ezra 2:1, 70 report that the returnees went to their towns, implying that they did not all dwell in Jerusalem. The number of the returnees may not be a myth, since the exiles were advised by God through Jeremiah to marry and increase in number (cf. Jeremiah 29:6). The number of returnees was inclusive of their servants (cf. Ezra 2:65), who were about 7337 in number and they may not have been of Jewish origin. Furthermore, some returnees had married foreign wives (Ezra 10:7-12) so that the Judeans in Babylon did not only increase by birth. There is a probability that proselytes were there in view of the miracles that God performed in Babylon. This is verified by the fact that when the King, Nebuchadnezzar, was overwhelmed by a sense of awe, he would praise and worship God (cf. Daniel 2:46-47; 3:27-29; 4:37). Fohrer (1973:312) emphasises that some people from other

religions did indeed join Judaism. The lack of archaeological evidence for population growth does not render it a fact that it never happened, since archaeology is not necessarily axiomatic in interpretation. Currid (1999:17) presents archaeology as a 'subjective', interpretive field of study. Therefore, archaeological findings and interpretations do not mean that some recorded historical facts are untrue due to archaeological silence. Archaeology may assist to fill historical gaps and augment historical data, but not to dispute history. There is no reason to dispute the report that says more than 49 000 persons returned to Judah after the exile.

Upon arrival in Judah or Jerusalem, the group of returnees that was led by Sheshbazzar found the people, whom they named 'people of the land', in Jerusalem and the surrounding places. The land of Judah had been reduced in size by the encroaching Edomites. There were also people in Judah who made it difficult for the returnees to rebuild the temple.

The perceptions of the Judeans during the exile of the meaning of the exile are considered by Fohrer (1973:308), who points out that some Judeans (especially the Elephantine community), thought the reforms of Josiah that led to the destruction of other idols worshipped in Judah could have infuriated the idols to cause the exile. The author also recognises that some Judeans ascribed the exile to Yahweh, who had been disobeyed by Judeans. The author (1973:309) considers that the remnant had various views on the exile. Of course, the Judeans were all concerned about the cause of the exile and the role of God during the exile.

The passages of the Bible that mention the concept of the exile of Judah are perceived by some scholars to be self-contradictory. Nevins (2006:5) blames Bible editors for not seeing conflict in the theological account of the exile. The conflict arises from the fact that not all Judeans were exiled, as it is clear from 2 Kings 25:12, 21, which mentions that some peasants remained. Nevins (2006:5) posits that only the information that was in harmony with their (the Bible authors) ideological positions was selected without considering the sequence of events. The Bible authors or editors were interested in writing theological messages rather than historical events. The Bible authors used earlier texts that projected the exile in the event of disobedience on the part of Israelite nation and incorporated the texts into their writing in the post-exilic era. The phrases like 'until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths' and 'to the full

measure of seventy years' are not compatible with the experience of the exile, yet they were included in the theological writing of the books of Kings and Chronicles (see 4.8 above).

The theory of total destruction and depopulation of Judah is considered by a number of scholars. Lipschits (2005:83) refers to 2 Kings 25:11, which implies that the entire population of Judah was exiled, while Nevins (2006:140) refers to Jeremiah 44:2, 6 and 22, which presents the land of Judah to have been left desolate. Nevins (2006:14) argues that such inferences were of late composition. Historically, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed and not the whole land of Judah. The population of the elite in Jerusalem was tremendously reduced. The interchangeable use of the names 'Judah' and 'Jerusalem' should not mislead the historical comprehension of the events that occurred. The Roman Empire was named after a city (Rome) and not the country of Italy. No historian has a problem with it. After all, without the organised, functional capital city of Jerusalem there could be no practical existence of the state of Judah (see 4.8.1 above).

Other scholars admit that some legitimate clergy and elite were deported, leaving no authentic leadership, which translated into a void of Judah in the land of Judah. Bigger (1994:236-237) regards the concept of national exile to be historically somewhat 'misleading.' The author (1994:237) ventures to regard the exiles as the true Judean community, as they were willing to return after the exile. Bigger's point castigates the remnant somewhat and ignores the fact that some of them did accept Judaism of Golah origin. Noth (1959:307) hits the nail on the head by clearly stating that the exiles were the 'legitimate line of Israel's history.' Thiessen (2009:66) also correctly points out that the returnees were the actual remnant of Israel. Cataldo (2010:55) defines the returned exiles as the 'seed of life', which saved the nation of Israel. Furthermore, Hermann (1981:292) and Bedford (2002:158) show that even the remnant recognised the returnees as legitimate leaders. Legitimacy was not a huge contest in the post-exilic period, thus attesting to the exile of the elite, which served in Jerusalem as the legitimate leadership in cultic and royal spheres. Their displacement was the displacement of Judah itself. The concept of the exile of Judah is expressed from a qualitative point of view and not a statistical point of view. Bright (1972:345) regards the exiles as the cream of the Judeans in

political, cultic and intellectual spheres. With the exile or departure of the elite, the wealthy and governing class in governance and the economy were taken out of Judah (Sacchi, 2000:49). The void left by the departure of the elite from Jerusalem was quite glaring and a cruel blow to the Judeans in Judah. Without the elite, there was no military, security, judiciary, trade, established cult to guide morality, and legitimate and uniting governance. Judah as a nation did not exist. It should always be remembered that the focal point of the attacks of Nebuchadnezzar was Jerusalem. The land of Judah or Jerusalem was emptied of all legitimacy of leadership in cultic and royal spheres.

There is a view that uses as its point of departure the conclusion that the exile of Judah denotes that Judah was empty. This view perceives the exile of the elite from Jerusalem to mean that all Judeans were exiled and thus the entire land was left empty of residents. Of course, this is not true, as it has been indicated, and therefore the scholars reasoning from the end of the events deem the exile to be a myth. Guillaume (2005:91) and Davies (1999:84) assert that the exile is a myth, since the exile would mean that all the Judeans were removed from Judah and allowed to return later. Guillaume (2005:91) calls this so-called myth 'exile-return'. Davies (1999) and Guillaume (2005) do not mean that none of the Judeans was deported, but referring to statements in the Bible that Judah was taken into exile they argue they would advocate a total deportation of the Judeans who were alive. In other words, there is no room in their interpretation for anything else than a literal meaning, which is not feasible; hence, the exile is a myth to them. Surely, the exile of Judah does not mean the exile of all Judeans. The Bible says that the peasants were not deported. The Bible authors wrote from the theological point of view that accentuates that what God introduced into Canaan would be displaced, dispersed and made powerless; thus, the land of Judah or Canaan would be devoid of what God brought into it. Those who remained in Judah were as good as the people of the land found in it when Israel first came to settle in the land. Just as the land was never found empty, it was never left entirely empty by the calamity of the exile. The concept of the exile of Judah should be interpreted in the context that it came from God, who led Israel into Canaan in the first place. At the time of the exile, Judah was the remnant of Israel, since Israel (the northern kingdom) was relatively dispersed by Assyria. However, when Judah went into exile, God, who worked

their way into Canaan, also worked their way out. The exile of Judah is not a literal, statistical, quantitative and sweeping statement, but a theological statement expressed by God long before the exile. Judeans perceived it already during the time of the exile, and not only after the exile. The exile of Judah never meant total depopulation in the Bible, but it is a theological concept (see 4.8.3 above).

Therefore, although history shows clearly that the land of Judah was never entirely depopulated during the exile, it does concede that the social lifestyle that had been practised in Judah was neither governed by a monarchic structure nor regulated by a set of cultic principles. The silence of history itself on what transpired in Judah during the exile concedes that Judah indeed had no societal organisation as Judah in its land. The disruption of the corporate commercial, judiciary, military, cultic and royal services rendered Judah to have been in exile, due to the deportations of the elite and the voluntary flight of some prominent persons, like Ishmael, to neighbouring countries in fear of Babylon. There is no argument that many things ceased to function in Judah until the end of the Babylonian regime. When the returnees came back, they could not see a difference between the Samaritans and the remnant, who had given up their identity and adopted a dubious lifestyle.

Davies (1999:77) and Hermann (1981:289) acknowledge that very little is known about the lifestyle of the remnant in Judah. Lipschits (2005:104) claims that de-urbanisation might have occurred, but life continued as usual. There are no details about the life of the remnant in Judah. Miller and Hayes (1986:426) notice the silence on priestly services in the books of 2 Kings and Jeremiah. Even the remnant did not report anything substantial about life in Judah during the exile. It may be justified by the fact that God did not reveal Himself in Judah during the exile. The developments in Judah during the exile without God's revelations could have appeared insignificant to write about, since they contained no theological insights. The concept of the exile of Judah is not a simplistic concept, but it should not be understood to mean a land entirely devoid of inhabitants.

7.5 The archaeological study of pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic finds about Judah

By the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah, the territory of Judah had been affected by other historical events. From 701 BCE, the Assyrians managed to destroy some cities of Judah (see 5.2 above). The territory of Judah was invaded before the exile period. The capital city, Jerusalem, was spared by divine intervention against Assyrian attack, but Judah was already a vassal state under Assyria (see 5.2. above). In 609 BCE, when Egyptians defeated Judah and killed their king, Josiah, the entire territory of Judah became subject to Egypt. In 605 BCE, subsequent to the conquest of Babylon over Assyria and Egypt at Carchemish, Judah became subject to Babylon.

The destruction of Jerusalem was not the beginning of the destruction of Judah, but the climax. Archaeological finds, including the Babylonian chronicle, referred to by Wiseman and Yamauchi (1980:50-51), give the impression that the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem was severe (see 5.3 above). Lachish letters dated around 588 BCE attest to the fact that Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylonians, but Azekah and Lachish were destroyed just before Jerusalem was. All that was destroyed in Judah largely remained in ruins until the time of the Persian era (see 5.3 above). The destroyed cities of Judah proper do not present much archaeological evidence that there was continued occupation, but the graves indicate that burials occurred even during the exile (see 5.5.1 above). The poor that remained in Judah needed graves for the burial of their deceased.

Archaeological finds of the southern part of Judah indicate that from time to time, the Edomites attacked Judah in the south. Furthermore, some pottery discoveries in the southern area of Judah are of Edomite origin (see 5.5.2. above). Urban areas were not continuously occupied during the exile. There was a humble subsistence lifestyle in Judah proper (see 5.5.3 above).

The question of the territory of Benjamin, which seems to have survived the destruction of Judah by Babylonians, is presented as a land that was cherished by Babylonians for agricultural produce (see 5.6. above). Keown *et al.* (1995:380) concludes that the peasants were needed for

agricultural work to produce food for the dietary needs of Babylonians and probably for export purposes. The utilisation of agricultural land in the territory of Benjamin for Babylonian benefit was not resisted at all. The territory of Benjamin became a haven for refugees from Judah proper and life continued unhindered in the Benjamin area. A political separation occurred between Judah proper and the Benjamin tribe; thus, the biblical account (Jeremiah 37:13) of the impact of the exile on Judah could be precluding the Benjamin territory (see 5.6 above).

While the overall population reduction in Judah was around 70% (see 5.5.1 above) the population reduction in Jerusalem was around 90% (see 5.7.1. above). Largely, archaeological finds of the exilic era in Judah show that the land of Judah was occupied during the exile.

The meagre archaeological finds of the exilic era clearly dispute the notion of total depopulation, but affirm the emptiness of Judah during the exile due to the lack of pottery production and the trade of pottery (see 5.8 above). The land of Judah had no governance to regulate business or trade. The poor people left behind indeed had a poor material culture.

Therefore, the destruction of Jerusalem, which was total according to Aharoni (1982:279), was disruptive to royalty services, business and religious identity in Judah. There were residents of Judean origin, generally regarded as poor people, in Judah during the exile. However, Shanks (1995:115-116) argues that some wealthy persons remained in Judah during the exile, which dispels the notion that maintains the absolute view that only the poor people remained in Judah. The fact that little is deduced from archaeological finds of the exilic period affirms the concept that Judah was emptied of productivity in material culture, thus signalling a state of virtual non-existence as an entity of any kind.

7.6 The theological study of the concept of the exile of Judah

The theological concept of the exile of Judah, and therefore the emptiness of Judah, is based on the events and experiences described in Lamentations 1:3; 2 Chronicles 36:20; 2 Kings 25:21 and Jeremiah 52:27. These texts describe the actual events of the exile as determined by God, who was angered by the sin of idolatry, according to Becking (2000:220). All these texts relate

to Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, which project a possible exile of Israel in the event of disobedience to God.

The passage of Lamentations 1:1-4 contrasts the disposition of Judah during the exile with its state in the pre-exilic era. The alliances that Judah had formed are presented as fruitless and deceptive in nature. The passage moves from political ties, which were of no avail, to the state of the cult during the exile, which is more about lamenting the devastation because of the oppressive slavery and immense suffering, probably inclusive of the famine of those days. The neighbouring states seemed to have had a hand in the utter destruction of Jerusalem. The streets of Jerusalem were empty because of the absence of the many cultic visitors of the time before the destruction. The gates were destroyed. The priests and the virgins were in mourning. The despair caused by the destruction of Jerusalem was felt by those members of the remnant that normally played a role in cultic services. The book of Lamentations contains poems that were composed in the context of the disruptive destruction of the temple and the palaces. In the very first poem, the concept of the exile of Judah is expressed by the Jerusalem remnant, not by relating the events of a story, but first by expressing the feelings of the remnant about the experience from its inception. Moreover, the focal point of the poet is Jerusalem, and not the entire land of Judah (see 6.3 above).

The passage of 2 Chronicles 36:15-21 gives an overview of developments that led to the exile and of the events that occurred until after the exile. When the nation of Judah provoked God by being idolatrous, God responded with compassion and sent prophets to rebuke his people. Through his prophets, he warned them that He would chastise them through the kings of the neighbouring nations. Unfortunately, the people of God incessantly despised and mocked his messengers together with His messages. Ultimately, God unleashed his wrath on his people, since there was no more remedy for their disobedience. God's wrath was unleashed through the unwitting agency of Babylon, who wrought devastating havoc in Jerusalem until 586 BCE. The author or authors of Chronicles present Jerusalem as the focal point where the rebellion of regent kings emanated and had to be restrained. God gave all the people of Judah into the hands of Babylon. The people of Judah were not destroyed primarily because they were

defeated, but because the same hand that had brought them to the Promised Land gave them over to the Chaldeans. Jeremiah was the exception (cf. Jeremiah 39:17-40:6). Subsequently, the temple and palaces were looted, destroyed and burnt. Many belonging to the elite were executed, deported or dispersed. Those who escaped the execution were exiled, according to the book of 2 Chronicles, thus indicating absolute deportation of elite residents of Jerusalem. As opposed to this interpretation of all residents being deported, the opinion of Avios (2009:66) with regard to Jeremiah is relevant. The destruction and the exile had been prophesied by, among others, Jeremiah (see 6.4. above). Avios (2009:66) in commenting on Jeremiah, who was given the option either to stay in Jerusalem or go to Babylon, posits, 'In the end Jeremiah remains in Israel, but his prophecy has not yet ended, because the entire people have not gone to Babylon.' Of course, Jeremiah may not have said that all the people would be deported, but that people should surrender themselves to Babylon and stay alive (cf. Jeremiah 21:9). Therefore, only the rebellious had to experience the excruciating agony such that the Babylonians displaced them and executed Zedekiah, and instituted a governor (in place of a vassal king), thus reducing the vassal state of Judah to a province of Babylon.

In interpreting Bible writings on the exile, redaction criticism, which is based on beliefs ranging from oral tradition, destruction of available scriptures in 586 BCE and the final composition and compilation of all Old Testament scriptures during the exile, is used by some authors (see 6.5 above). Sharp (2004:153) and Gerstenberger (2002:212) indicate that during the exile period, some scriptures were written anew and some biblical books were composed and written from the beginning. The main point of Gerstenberger (2002) is that in the process of writing, interpretations of biblical books were included. The belief that all teachings and beliefs of the Judeans were in oral form at the beginning of the exile precipitate the notion that at that time, none of their literature had been written yet; thus, all Old Testament scriptures were only written from the time of the exile. This is a belief and not a fact. Room for doubt is created by this belief. Some scriptures were written about the exile even before the exile, which was yet to come. Jeremiah had Baruch as his scribe before the exile. Therefore, writing religious literature was practised before the exile.

Other scholars prefer to use source criticism and classify all passages into definitive categories in accordance with different sources (see 6.5 above). Preuss (1996:199) attempts to define the Yahwist source throughout Old Testament scriptures as an older source and the Priestly as a later source composed in tragic times. According to Person (2010:23) and Preuss (1996:121), there is also a Deuteronomic history or work, which is said to have come into being during the exile and was redacted up to and including the post-exilic era. Source criticism is applied by Person (2010) and Preuss (1996) to emphasise the authorial intent of Bible authors. Thus, they minimise some theological themes as minor themes or describe them as a means to accomplish their (Bible authors) authorial intentions. Person (2010:65-66) believes that oral tradition was used until the end of the monarchy, which was virtually the beginning of the exile. This would mean that the various sources used to write biblical books after the monarchy were in oral form. Source criticism looks at the process of compilation and composition in writing the books of the Bible (Boyles 2001:228). Broyles (2001:225-226) regards the sources referred to by source criticism to be literary in nature or form. However, Broyles (2001:229) indicates that not all biblical scholars agree with the findings of source criticism, since it often employs 'excessive subdivision of sources and erroneous assumptions....' Another characteristic of source criticism is that it would rather find dates of perceived sources in biblical books than the dates of the biblical books. In this respect, source criticism differs from the process of redaction, which accommodates later sources in finalizing literary biblical books. However, source criticism relates to redaction criticism, as the latter is also concerned with the final compilation of information drawn from various sources accompanied by interpretations in finalizing the work of writing a given biblical book.

In the process of redaction, perspectives that were not part of a particular tradition are deciphered to have been added to the final text. Moreover, some books are thought to be inclined to a particular tradition. Consequently, the texts of some passages in a Bible book, though they have the character of older traditions, are viewed to be compatible with later traditions, and thus they may not be of the same age of the rest of a given biblical book. While redaction and anachronisms are indisputable, an element of subjectivity in determining the age of themes and texts may not be ruled out. The concept of the exile dates back to a time long

before the exile itself. Redaction criticism intertwined with source criticism cannot render the exile as a theology or perspective that is based on events from the beginning of the exile. The context of the concept of the exile in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy is relevant to the conditions for Israel to dwell in the Promised Land. Therefore, the exile theme dates back to the settlement time.

Birch & Brueggemann (1999:345) and Knight (1977:224) note that much more is recorded in the Old Testament about the Golah experience of the returnees than the experiences of the remnant. This notion leads to the conclusion that the Golah community disregarded the remnant altogether. Gerstenberger (2002:211-212) even ascribes the Torah to the exiles and sees abasement in naming a character 'Moses' in returnee propaganda. Levin (2010a:62-63) argues that the propaganda of the returnees was figuratively put into the mouths of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (see 6.5.1 above). Gerstenberger (2002) and Levin (2010a) do not recognise the revelations of God, but the intentions of Bible authors. This even disregards the role that God played through his prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel. However, the book of Lamentations explicitly shows that the role of God in the exile experience is not disregarded, while the concept of the exile of Judah is also expressed in the poems by the remnant. The concept of the exile of Judah was not a construct of returnees to suppress those that had remained.

The wording of 2 Chronicles 36 regarding the exile is similar to that of Leviticus 26:34. The passages found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 which are pre-emptive of the exile are presumed to have been informed by the exile itself and probably only composed during the exile (see 6.5.2 above). The similarity in wording is explained with redaction criticism overtones by Muller (2010b:228), who claims that a part of Leviticus was written by Moses, while other parts may be attributed either to Jeremiah or Ezekiel. Briefly, Leviticus 26:34 is regarded as a later addition to the book. The possibility of the authors of Chronicles drawing from Leviticus in their writing is an acceptable explanation, because the language of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, though detailed, is not overtly anachronistic and could not be used in a mourning context. The redactors probably used it from a source especially the book of Chronicles which draws and refers to them for more information. Lundbom (2004:530) in commenting on Jeremiah 52:27

considers the conclusive sentence that says, 'And Judah was exiled from off his land.' He indicates that this expression is not found in the LXX, 'most likely another loss due to haplography....' The author continues to say that the expression is not an addition from the Masoretic text. The age of the concept of the exile of Judah is not a post-exilic one. Bullock to have been produced only from the Persian period as minimalists, who render the historicity of the Bible questionable (see 6.5.2 above).

The relationship between history and theology is pivotal in understanding theological concepts properly. Generally, all history is selective and has an element of subjectivity, which is informed by the intention of the writer. Theology concerns revelations of God's will and actions in different contexts. The Bible is more about theology than history, and concessions are made in the Bible that more historical details are found in other sources of the time (see 6.6 above). The message coming from the Bible may not necessarily have failed or deemed to be incorrect due to its apparent historical inaccuracies. In the context of the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon, the historian would see Babylon defeating Judah, while a theologian would accept the revelation of the involvement of God. In the whole picture, Babylon is actually used by God to subjugate Judah. Historians ought to search for the role of God in the history of Judah. History is the context or the backdrop of the revelations of God's works in the Bible. This approach would increase historical knowledge as opposed to being limited to what transpired without recognizing the divine force involved behind scenes. Moreover, the selective nature of history disqualifies the discipline from being used to judge theological writings. The intention of Bible authors in writing the books of Chronicles and Kings was theological (see 6.6.1 above).

7.6.1 Divine involvement approach

I hereby propose a new approach to the study of historical Bible texts and call it the *divine involvement approach*. This approach is recommended for historical writings in the Bible. The point of departure for this approach to historical writings in the Bible is that Bible scholars should desist from working as antagonists and work as choice or decision makers in studying history pertaining to biblical texts of interest. By history is meant events that are also recorded

in historical sources other than the Bible. The divine involvement approach is not meant to replace or oppose historical criticism, but to complement it.

Kostenberger & Patterson (2011:74) and Bartholomew *et al.* (2003:27) present historical criticism as a Bible interpretation approach that originated during the time of the enlightenment. The motivation for this approach is to employ human reason alone to determine whether the biblical account of any event is true or not. Human reason alone is employed to study first, what the text says about history, and second, the history of the text, which is inclusive of how the text came about, according to Hayes & Holladay (1988:45). The authors (1988:49) continue to explain that the histories taken into consideration include the history of the time of the narrated events, as well as the time of the writing of the text. Gorman (2009:16) succinctly defines historical criticism as ‘the quest for the events that surrounded the production of the text, including the purported events narrated by the text.’ Bartholomew *et al.* (2003:28) indicates that historical criticism is said to be a scientific approach that precludes ‘theological assumptions or presuppositions.’ The author (2003:29) furthermore points out that the intentions of the Bible authors take precedence over ‘divine intentions and teaching’

Historical criticism is not entirely unacceptable, but it is defective if it is applied to the letter. It is very important that the Bible scholar should understand the history in and around the biblical text of interest. The history of the text and the history in the text, if not thoroughly studied, could appear to be contradictory. Usually, the history of the text is made and framed selectively to mould the history according to the intent of the text, as in the case of the concept of the exile of Judah. Excluding the work of God in the history of Israel or Judah is a glaring omission, because without God the history of those kingdoms would not be part of the Bible. Without overstating the inspiration of the Bible authors, the role of God in all that transpired in Judah is of paramount importance. Primarily, the Bible is written to highlight the will, revelations and role of God in the history of his chosen people. God, in any person of the Godhead, is the centre of the Bible. It is a non-starter to attempt to understand the Bible from a perspective that is oblivious of God or that deliberately takes God out of the equation. The proposed divine involvement approach puts the will, intentions and actions of God parallel with human reason,

a parallelism that has to be considered prior to arriving at a conclusion of the meaning of a biblical text.

It appears that historical criticism seeks to use human reason alone to determine whether biblical texts are true or not. In fact, the intention of historical criticism to arrive at conclusions that all can accept has failed, because some Bible scholars disagree with this approach. To determine whether something is true or not does not mean to interpret it, since its meaning would not be important if the text or theme were to be deemed false. Silva (1994:236) says that 'to interpret the Bible historically meant almost by definition to acknowledge that it contains contradictions' The author further highlights that historical criticism maintains that the Bible is not completely 'reliable.' Gorman (2009:238) explains the process and problem of historical criticism and indicates that in transcribing oral tradition and redaction, 'other things claimed in the biblical writings may or may not have happened as presented.' Redaction and the history and process of writing down Scripture have repeatedly served as hooks for hanging some scholars' bags of doubt. However, Hayes & Holladay (1988:51) caution, 'This reminds the interpreter that much of the biblical material is genetically related in the sense that earlier materials are taken up, incorporated, and re-presented in later materials.' The related texts of the Bible should be accepted and used to understand the role, intentions and will of God concerning a particular matter that is hinted at in various biblical books. It need not be that a particular matter was composed at the same time and included in various books where it appeared feasible. Bible interpreters should not assume the unnecessary role of being Bible investigators to determine right and wrong in the Bible. Therefore, the divine involvement approach draws the attention of the Bible student to the work of God in the history of his people, which might be what historical criticism either lacks or eschews.

Historical criticism has not brought about unity in the realm of biblical interpretation, but a division. Theological presuppositions and the role of God in Biblical themes are not esteemed, but human reason alone is used as a tool to accept or reject what biblical texts say. The notion of treating the Bible just like any other book is rejected by some Bible students, according to Kostenberger and Patterson (2011:77) and Silva (1994:236). Silva (1994:235) states, 'Many

students of the Bible, including important scholars, have rejected this method on the grounds that it is incompatible with the divine character of scripture.’ Consequently, Silva (1994:237) reports that there was a division around the twentieth century between conservative and liberal approaches. Probably, historical criticism could be labelled ‘liberal’. In attempting to ease the tension between liberals and conservatives, Silva (1994:237) states that ‘the fundamental antithesis between the conservative and critical schools must not obscure their common goal of discovering the historical meaning of the text.’

Historical criticism and its use of human reason alone and the conservatives’ protest against using the Bible like any other book based on inspiration of Scripture have caused a division and a spirit of disassociation. This situation needs a remedy that is not necessarily agreement or consensus, but an understanding that God was involved in the life of the Israelite nation. The historical critics and conservatives should not consider history without God, who may not be part of history per se, but who is above history. Historical knowledge and understanding should not be oblivious of the involvement of God in Israel and Judah. The divine involvement approach seeks to find harmony between conservatives and liberals. This does not mean that Bible students will agree because of this new approach, but a Bible student would clearly indicate the basis of his or her conclusions. The basis of a conclusion that precludes theology in the study of the Bible would be respectfully rendered less holistic in nature, and thus as a theology that makes choices based on personal preference as opposed to theology based on facts. Furthermore, a theologically sensitive Bible student that disregards history would also be regarded as a supporter of a doctrine whose adherents make choices based on their own preferences as opposed to sensible, exhaustive (holistic) and factual learners. God, in revealing his will and intentions, cannot be ignored if Bible students are fairly considerate of all stakeholders in the history of Judah or Israel. Kostenberger and Patterson (2011:96) advocate historical research in studying biblical texts and regard the Bible literature that is not preclusive of theology as the revelations of God in history.

In paving the way to understand the history of Israel and Judah, Efird (2001:36) explains that ancient people perceived history to have been under the control of their gods. The author

continues to say that their understanding of history was a religious matter. The author (2001:36), poignantly states the following: 'The Hebrew people were especially sensitive to this understanding of history. One of their fundamental beliefs was that Yahweh was the God of history and was working out divine plans and purposes in and through the historical process.' It is interesting that the Bible is a Hebrew literature per se and their God, Yahweh, was central in their lives, even when they were unfaithful to Him. Yahweh led his people out of Egypt into the Promised Land, He allowed the exile of Judah later on, and eventually promised a return from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem. According to the Bible, either God orchestrated virtually all major events of Judah or God had a hand in them. God cannot be taken out of the history of Judah.

Kostenberger and Patterson (2011:95) succinctly assert, 'The view of history as events "as they actually happened" has given way to the realisation that all historiography is of necessity subjective.' How can a subjective discipline determine the objectivity and truthfulness of another discipline? No history can and should mark the Bible right or wrong. In fact, the Bible is meant for those that hunger and thirst for theology or the will of God. As for historical hunger and thirst, it will never be quenched, because it is a human enterprise often written with hidden motives. Silva (1994:237) intimates that 'history also reminds us that theological commitments can hardly be separated from decisions about hermeneutic principles.' Kostenberger & Patterson (2011:78) assert, 'Only an approach to the study of Scripture that properly balances history, literature and theology will be adequate to the task.' It suffices that in studying the Bible, theology is significant and cannot be ruled out.

The divine involvement approach may not be a criticism as such, but a study of the role of God in the history of Israel and Judah. This will help Bible students not just to see and read about historical events. Some themes like that of the exile were expressed by God first and therefore they may be studied from a 'divine involvement' approach. This kind of a discipline would underscore the fact that the history of Judah around the exilic time was under the control of the invisible yet invincible hand of God. The discipline that I propose would ask the question, what was or is the role of God in the matter at hand? Thus, Bible students would view the will of God in context before arriving at any conclusion. As a result, much more harmony would be

prevalent in theological discourse. This approach would embrace theology as the revelations of God and show the position or side that God took in a particular event or matter. This approach points out the position of God even in events that are catastrophic or in discord with theological norms under normal circumstances. To explain the strength of the approach, the experience of Samson may be used (cf. Judges 14, 15). Even though God prohibited exogamy (e.g. Deuteronomy 7:3-4), he made Samson marry a Philistine in order to retaliate for his people from within the land of the Philistines, but Delilah (the second wife) was not on the agenda of God.

Returning to the exile of Judah, it was not the will or desire of God that they should be exiled, but God handed them over to the Babylonians because of their disobedience to Him (cf. 2 Chronicles 36:17). Furthermore, Jeremiah 21:5-6 says the following: 'And I Myself will fight against you with an outstretched arm and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath. And I will strike the people of this city, both man and beast. They shall die of a great plague.' The divine involvement approach will help Bible students to look at the work of God, not with the intention of establishing a doctrine, lesson, morality or code of conduct, but with the wish to know what the role of God was in a particular event. If some matters or themes in the Bible do not make sense according to human reason, then the position of God may be studied and scrutinised, especially if the biblical texts clearly indicate that God was involved in that particular matter. The divine involvement approach should not be perceived as a defensive mechanism or strategy, but as an approach that acknowledges the hand of God in the history of Judah. It attempts to show what God meant by doing or allowing some things to happen. Focusing on Bible authors to the extent of constructing the clairvoyance concept, which ascribes some capabilities of foreseeing the future in order to eschew the reality of prophecy, is desperately trying to ignore God and put Him aside when He is at the centre of most events in the Bible. God, as the stakeholder in the history of Judah, should be heard and understood as the maker of the history of his people and the steering guide to their destiny.

7.6.2 Theological study of the exile of Judah continued

In order to arrive at the theological significance of the exile of Judah, the role of the politics of that time should be put into perspective. Political motives have been deduced by some scholars regarding the subject of the exile of Judah. Sharp (2004:159) deduces political motives that propelled Bible writers to write about the emptiness of Judah during the exile. Almost all Bible authors that espouse the concept of the exile of Judah are perceived to have been part of the returnees. In a way, it is said, they meant to entrench their political desires (see 6.7 above). This is an incorrect understanding, since the book of Lamentations echoes the same concept of the exile of Judah during the exile. Of course, the religion and politics of Judah were closely knit. However, biblical authors did not embrace the concept of the exile of Judah for the sake of factional or political reasons, since there was no civil war over the rightful ownership of the land of Judah and its governance during the early Persian period.

The identity of the Jews was obtained primarily by accepting a structured creed as opposed to identity as a hereditary matter. It appears that the politics and the religion of Judah were inseparable prior to the exile and even after the exile. Smith (1989:64) argues that Judaism could have encouraged political unity in order to survive. Gerstenberger (2002:208) ascribes political solidarity to the fact that while in Babylon, the exiles were not scattered, but lived in close proximity. Curtis (2003:302) concludes that the preservation of religion in Golah realms happened concurrently with that of culture, hence the rigidity towards the remnant, whom the returnees found (see 6.7 above). Clements (1988:271) explains that the exiled Judeans lived together in Babylon and were able to consolidate and become a formidable formation, while the remnant as a group was weakened by infiltrating peoples of other nations. The exiles could not be apolitical both in Babylon and back at home, since they needed a strong sense of identity to realise the restoration of Jerusalem. The returnees did not intend to murder the remnant, and therefore their politics were not about supplanting the remnant. They were willing to accept the remnant Jews if they in turn accepted their new code of ethics of Golah origin, which included a few basic principles. They had identified the cause of their exile and seriously loathed it, thus expecting the remnant to comply with their moral standards. Issues of

cultic legitimacy were not contested. Political legitimacy depended on Persian authorities. It had to be accepted that the restoration of royal legitimacy was not a Persian policy.

The exile was a reality and not a folk tale. Some residents remained in Judah, even according to the Bible. The impact on Judah was so severe that the remnant could do nothing much to rebuild the dilapidated structures and restore the disrupted systems of Judah. The remnant peasants, inclusive of Benjaminites and the priestly residue in Jerusalem, were unable to restore anything that had been disrupted, as any attempt at restoration would be deemed as rebellion (see 6.7 above). Murphy (2002:20) elaborates on the wretched state of Judah, which was the result of the conquest of Babylon over Judah in 597, 587 and 582 BCE, and says that Judah was left without 'leaders, craftsmen, smiths, soldiers and courtiers.' The author referring to those times tersely states, 'The monarchy is no more.' Fritz (2003:422) underscores the fact that Judah was not totally depopulated by saying that the peasants that remained always constituted the majority of the population. Therefore, it may be deduced that more Judeans than one would expect remained in Judah during the exile. In summary, it can be stated that political factors played a role in the events of the exile and the return of Judah, but that politics were not the driving force behind those events.

However, the theological concept of the exile of Judah, with Jerusalem as the focal point, is better understood when considered from the viewpoint of the factors that led to the exile. Primarily, continuous sin was the cause of the exile permitted by God in his wrath. The exile concept was not heard of only during the exile, but long before it. The empty land motif is not a philosophical and unrealistic idea, but it is a further conceptualisation of the concept of the exile of Judah. The exile of Judah never meant total depopulation. Judah was robbed of its civil and cultic systems with the destruction of their base, Jerusalem, and the deportation of the elite, who rendered services in Jerusalem. Judah remained an unregulated and a demonised space due to their rebellion. The sense of identity was taken out of Judah by Babylon under the control of God. Due to reasoning from a misconception that the exile of Judah meant total depopulation, words like 'myth' and 'fiction' are used to label the concept of the exile of Judah. The analogy of figs as presented in Jeremiah 24 is pivotal in understanding the destiny of the

remnant and the exiles. Prosperity was promised to those who would surrender to Babylon and doom was foretold to befall the rebellious and those that would flee to Egypt. The presence of God would be with the exiles, while the remnant and emigrants would be rejected and were likened to bad figs. Theologically, the exiles would be favoured with the presence and providence of God; thus, the returnees were the actual remnant from a theological point of view. In the final analysis, the exiled elite of Judah returned from exile during the Persian regime. The new religion, usually called Judaism, was the heart and centre of Judah, and it held them together after they had experienced the difference between serving God and a king of another land. Mayes (1989:84) posits, 'Those left in Judah were of little significance; the center of gravity and the vital forces of Judaism now lay in the Diasporah.' Indeed, Judah was exiled during the exile.

It has already been said that the passages selected for this research, namely 2 Kings and Jeremiah, as well as other relevant texts, clearly describe the events and experiences that constitute the concept of the exile of Judah. Therefore, these passages are theological in nature and do not refer to the whole population of Judah, but to Jerusalem as the focal point. According to Ezekiel 5:12, one third would die due to famine and pestilence, another third would die by the sword and the last third would be scattered in all directions of the wind and pursued with a drawn sword. Jerusalem itself was not emptied of all residents. The Judeans who were deported from Jerusalem to Babylon were not the entire Judean population, but that those in positions of service in Judah were not in Jerusalem anymore, is the crux of the matter. Avios (2009:66) states, 'The Kingship of the House of David ceased, and has not been renewed to this day.' Mare (1987:113) says that the ultimate condition of Judah was that 'the monarchy of Judah came to an end.' House (1998:269) elucidates that the destruction of Jerusalem during king Zedekiah's reign resulted in the 'loss of city, temple, populace, land and monarchy.' House (1998:269) further says that the fact that Gedaliah was appointed as governor signifies that the land was not left empty of residents. It is not merely a philosophical idea that the concept of the exile of Judah is precluding the population as a whole, for the losses of Judah in 586 BCE as mentioned above by Avios (2009), Mare (1987) and House (1998), were vast and properly constitute the exile of Judah.

7.7 Conclusion

The concept of the exile of Judah was not a matter of dispute among the Judeans of the exilic and post-exilic times. Although part of the land was lost to the Edomites and the infiltration by other people resulted in their amalgamation with the remnant Judeans, and ultimately, the so-called 'people of the land' came into being, the land of Judah was never totally occupied by foreign people or renamed. Not much is known historically about the kind of life in Judah during the exile; thus, the identity of the remnant as Judeans disintegrated rendering qualitative Judah to be in exile. Archaeologically, the paucity of material culture of exilic Judah supports the concept that Judah was exiled. Theologically, the analogy of figs presents the exiles to Babylon as the actual remnant of Judah, who with God's providential favour was refined, reformed and revived outside Judah for some years with a view to their future restoration as the nation loyal to God. Whoever remained in Judah or Jerusalem throughout the exile was too insignificant to be regarded as Judah. However, some of those who remained in Judah did enlist in the Judaism that came from Babylon as the Jewish religion after the failure of so-called Yahwism.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

The meaning of the exile of Judah as it is expressed in some books of the Bible has become a cause of disagreement among scholars towards the end of the 20th century. Among other things, the realisation that there is no scholarly consensus on the issue precipitated the need to study the exile theology in depth. Two texts in biblical books from different times of composition have been selected to serve as the point of departure in the investigation, namely 2 Chronicles 36:15-21 and Lamentations 1:1-4. Introductory studies of some biblical books, as well as geographical, historical, archaeological and theological perspectives, were incorporated in the research in order to reach a balanced conclusion.

With regard to the methodology of the research, each one of the various perspectives has been featured as a different chapter in chapters 2-6. Chapter 7 seeks to find harmony in the apparent contradiction between history and theology. In the pursuit of seeking harmony with regard to the matter of the exile of Judah, a proposal for a new approach to the study of historical Bible texts has been put forth.

8.2 Geographical study of exilic and early post-exilic Judah

The land of Judah was studied in the second chapter, from the time of the settlement to the early post-exilic period. Scholarly consensus on the size of the land of Judah from the settlement time has not been realised, but certain facts are accepted as indisputable. An example is that the tribe of Simeon settled in Judah territory, but eventually it ceased to exist as a separate tribe.

The study of the impact of the subjugation of Judah by Babylon shows that the peripheral areas of Judah were lost, in particular the Negev, which was seized by the Edomites. The destruction of Jerusalem, the capital city, at the centre of Judah, rendered the land to be in disarray. In

Judah proper, many cities were destroyed, but in the Benjamin territory, fewer cities were destroyed.

In the early Persian era, Judah came to be known as the *Yehud* province. The boundaries of Yehud, the residue of the land of Judah, show that the borders of Judah had severely shrunk, as illustrated by Ahlstrom (1994:542) on a map (see Map 4 above).

The Benjamin territory, which was part of Judah, assumed a position different from that of Judah by surrendering to Babylon at the defeat of Judah and during the exile. The elite in Jerusalem considered the Benjaminites to have joined Babylon. A separation based on ideological grounds came into existence between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Eventually, the elite of Jerusalem regarded the Benjamin territory to have defected to Babylon.

8.3 Introductory study of Chronicles, Lamentations and Ezra-Nehemiah

Since the passages selected as a point of departure in this research are drawn from the biblical books of 2 Chronicles and Lamentations, it was necessary to embark on an introductory study of these books. An introductory study of the book Ezra-Nehemiah has also been undertaken, since this book gives an account of the activities connected to the actual return, namely reconstruction and reformation.

The title of the book of Chronicles in the Hebrew Bible is *dibre hayyammim* and in this thesis, it is understood to mean ‘the words of the days’. Although the book appears to be historical in nature, its theological content is the main objective of its authors. The authorship of the book has not been clearly established, but it may be attributed to writers from post-exilic Levitical realms in Jerusalem. There is no doubt that the date of the book is post-exilic. The addressees are a post-exilic audience that was involved in reformation and reconstruction. The main point of the book concerns the revival of the cult after the exile.

The book of Ezra-Nehemiah is called Ezra in the Hebrew Bible. The book is clearly post-exilic and deals with reformation and reconstruction. The authorship of the book is anonymous. The

addressees of the book were the Jews in Jerusalem. The thrust of the messages of the book are doctrinal in nature and in line with the new faith of the time, namely Judaism.

The book of Lamentations is an exilic source without a title originally, and it is composed of five dirges or lament poems. The authors of the poems, who are anonymous, were not exiled. The poems seem to have been created very early in the exilic era. Among others, the major addressee of the book appears to be God, but among other functions of the book, is to commemorate the destruction of the temple. The book is short, yet packed with a myriad of messages for the Judeans that had not gone into exile yet. The contents are in harmony with post-exilic biblical books on the subject of the exile of Judah (Lamentations 1:3).

8.4 Historical study of the exilic and early post-exilic Judah

Historical studies have shown that Babylon was not the first Empire that had a negative influence on Judah, but that Assyria had earlier seized part of the land of Judah. King Josiah of Judah is said to have restored some of the land lost to Assyria. His premature death in 609 BCE, and the fact that Judah subsequently became subject to Egypt, ushered in a new political era. Egypt influenced the kings of Judah against Babylon. This probably came into effect when Egypt deposed King Jehoahaz and deported him to Egypt. Jehoahaz could have been the link between Egypt and the kings of Judah. The influence of Egypt on Judah finally led to the tragic destruction of Jerusalem and some other cities in Judah in 586 BCE during the reign of Zedekiah.

At the fall of Jerusalem, some elites were deported. Those who remained in Jerusalem were peasants. Gedaliah was appointed to govern the peasants in Mizpah, but he was assassinated in a conspiracy led by Ishmael. As a result, Judah was left with no governance and the palaces and cultic areas in Jerusalem lay in ruins.

The population of Judah in Jerusalem was reduced by executions, deportations and emigrations, or flight out of Jerusalem in fear of Babylon. Lamentation was the content of the meagre cultic expression in Jerusalem during the exile, but in Babylon, the religion flourished and led to the formation of Judaism. The fall of Jerusalem marked the end of Judah as a political

entity. Military, trade and cultic services were displaced and the Babylonians neglected the interests of Judeans. Almost nothing is known about the lifestyle of those that remained in Judah.

Eventually in 539 BCE, Babylon fell to Persia, and this marked the end of the forced exile. In 538 BCE King Cyrus of Persia issued a decree, according to which the Jews were released to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Some Jews returning from Babylon did not settle in Jerusalem, but went to the surrounding cities. The city of Jerusalem was not found empty of residents, but a mixed population of Jews and other nations that had infiltrated the land during the exile occupied it. Some of these peoples found in Judah are said to be the descendants of Samaritans. They were people who were introduced into the north by Esarhadon, King of Assyria. Eventually, they settled near Jerusalem and demanded to participate in the reconstruction of the temple.

Historically, the exile is perceived by some to be about total destruction, but it must be kept in mind that the focal point of total destruction was Jerusalem. The deportation of the legitimate leaders or monarchs, together with a large part of the elite, ushered in the era of the exile of Judah. Some scholars, like Guillaume (2005) and Davies (1999), regard the concept of the exile of Judah as a myth, if it denotes that all Judeans were exiled and the land was left empty. They pose this view in the light of the fact that even the Bible provides historical facts to the effect that the territory of Judah was clearly not devoid of inhabitants during the exile. However, the concept of the emptiness of Judah refers to the absence of leadership in the royal and cultic spheres, and not to the absence of all citizens.

8.5 Archaeological study of the exilic and early Persian Judah

Archaeological studies indicate that even prior to the exile the land of Judah was subjected to destruction and attacks by other nations like Assyria. However, the city of Jerusalem was spared by the power of God.

The destruction of other cities like Azekah and Lachish preceded that of Jerusalem, according to the ostraca that were written by Hoshai and sent to Yaosh. Archaeological studies attest to a

fatal destruction of Jerusalem, but indicate that the territory of Benjamin was not severely affected.

Judah was neglected in line with the Babylonian policy, which only provided for the interests of Babylon proper. Exilic depopulation in Judah was about 70%. Idumea was increased by seizing part of Judah from the south.

Archaeological finds show some continuity of human existence in Judah during the exile. Population reduction in Jerusalem was about 90%. It was severe, yet not exhaustive. It appears that burials continued in Jerusalem during the exile. There was continuity in Mizpah and in the Benjamin territory. Largely there was continuity in rural areas, since the destruction wrought by Babylonians de-urbanised Judah considerably. The material culture of the exilic period in Judah was poor or non-existent. Not much is known about what happened in Judah during the exile.

Archaeological finds dispute total depopulation, yet portray a gap of material culture because of the exile of the elite.

8.6 The theological study of the concept of the exile of Judah

The exercise of delving into the selected passages (Lamentations 1:1-4 and 2 Chronicles 36:15-21) has magnified the fact that the focal point of the concept of the exile of Judah is Jerusalem. The context of the expression is informed by the condition of the city, according to Lamentations 1:1-4, as well as by other details like the destruction and looting of the temple and the city of Jerusalem, according to 2 Chronicles 36:15-21. If the context is taken into account, the conceptualisation of the exile of Judah becomes heavily laden.

The redaction criticism that is used to explain Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 as passages that were added later in the stated books cannot hold water, because phrases like 'the land will enjoy its Sabbaths' is not compatible with the whole book of Lamentations and other psalms like Psalm 137. In fact, the book of 2 Chronicles uses some words that are the same as those that were written earlier. The exile theology dates back to the settlement time. Therefore, the exile theology was not an exilic construct. Furthermore, the book of Lamentations itself, by

expressing the concept of the exile disputes the notion that the concept of the exile of is a Golah construct.

History and theology in biblical books are not equal, but theology is supreme and history is used selectively to paint a context for theological revelations and concepts. The Hebrew Bible presents no book as a historical book, but remarkably, the books of Kings and Chronicles refer to other historical sources with more details.

Practically, the exile does not imply total depopulation, but it was severe and its negative effects lasted very long. The exile theology came to fruition during the Babylonian exile due to the disobedience of Judah, despite repeated prophetic exhortations. The expression that says Judah was sent into exile is misleading if the Jerusalem context is overlooked because of the use of the name Judah in the biblical discourse. What Jerusalem was emptied of comprised all the legitimacy of Judah. Without it, Judah was as good as empty or exiled. Conclusions of myth and fiction as regards the concept are made due to ignoring the Jerusalem city context of the concept.

The analogy of figs as presented in Jeremiah 24 clearly gives hope to the Golah exiles and expresses doom for the remnant and emigrants to other countries like Egypt. Significantly, God favoured the Golah exiles with his presence as a little sanctuary. Thus, the Golah exiles were to be the actual remnant of Judah. When the remnant or returnees and their offspring write about the exile of Judah, they express an older theology that was also acknowledged by the Judeans that remained in Judah during the exile.

8.7 Finding harmony between historical and theological understanding of the Bible

In seeking harmony between historical and theological writing in the Bible, it has been determined that the concept of the exile of Judah was not debated among Judeans, but that it was a well-accepted concept from the exilic period to the post-exilic period. The absence of the functions of the deported elite left a huge gap in the functionality of Judah as a nation.

The land of Judah shrank due to the exile of Judah, which meant among others the lack of military services. Thus, infiltration and dilution of the nation of Judah was rampant. As for Babylon, it only had agricultural interests in the land of Judah, and probably felt no concern for the inhabitants.

The books of Lamentations and Chronicles, which were written at different times for different addressees, espouse the concept of the exile of Judah. Those that remained in Judah and the returnees had a harmonious understanding of the concept of the exile of Judah.

Historically, the land of Judah was not left without residents. Furthermore, the lifestyle of those that remained in Judah is neither known nor documented, thus pointing to the conceptualisation of the exile of Judah as emptiness of all that had been significant to Judah in their unique history as the people of God. Trade, judiciary, military, cultic and royal services ceased, and as a result, there was no noticeable difference between the remnant of Judah that remained in the land and the people of the land.

Archaeologically, there are traces of continuity of residence in Judah, which disputes total depopulation and desolation. The poor material culture of the exilic era attests to the concept of the exile of Judah. The exile gap is glaring, but it does not indicate non-occupation of the land.

Theologically, the exile theology existed in the pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic periods. God first pronounced the exile and unfolded it through Babylon and then He ended it through Persia. The exile is a theological concept and should be regarded as superior to historical witnesses and records. The *divine involvement approach* to biblical study, which is hereby proposed, could bring harmony in the realms of biblical interpretation, as the authors of the Bible would not be the only persons under scrutiny, but the involvement of God would be taken into consideration. Thus, the divine will, objectives, power, reasons and reasoning would be appreciated to be superior to visible and recorded evidence, and even higher than human reason itself (cf. Isaiah 55:8, 9).

Overall, the concept of the exile of Judah must be understood in the context of the superior rule of God over historical events.

8.8 Conclusion

Finally, the concept of the exile of Judah focuses on Jerusalem and the significance of the deportation of the elite as its direct context. Qualitatively, Judah was essentially exiled when the exiled elite left a void in the civil, cultic, judiciary, trade, military and cultural spheres of Judah as a nation. Moreover, the capital city was destroyed and somewhat demonised, and the Mizpah governance establishment was disrupted with the assassination of Gedaliah. Above all things, the God of the nation of Judah ceased to reveal Himself in Judah; yet, He revealed Himself in Babylon in favour of the Judean captives. What would the nation of Judah be without their God? Theologically, the fact that Judah was indeed exiled is precluding statistical, literal and demographic factors, which are quantitative in nature. The actual exile was the work of God. The true meaning of the exile of Judah could be interpreted that God, by carrying out the exile of Judah, realised his intention of disciplining his disobedient people by stripping them of everything they valued above Him, a measure that is conceptualised as the emptiness of Judah and that is corroborated and attested by geographical, archaeological, historical and theological studies.

In view of the restoration scope, which was religious in nature, the position of God in respect of the politics of Judah, which led to the New Testament era, needs to be studied. Furthermore, the re-establishment of trade, judiciary, military and cultural practices, which need a civil structure for monitoring purposes, may also need further investigation. The relationship of prophetic services and civil services after the exile, if they are known at all, may need to be studied. The very refilling of what had been emptied in Judah may need further exploration.

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