Reading 'House of Jacob' in Isaiah 48:1-11 in Light of Benjamin.

Abstract: Isaiah 48:1-11 has been described as a difficult passage due to a perceived discord between its harsh tone and the message of comfort espoused elsewhere in Isaiah 40-55. This paper analyses this passage with regard to four groups of arguments, namely, proposals of a Judahite origin for the text, the archaeological evidence for settlement continuity in the Benjaminite region in the Neo-Babylonian period, the development and use of the patriarchal traditions in the sixth century, and studies of hidden polemic. By drawing these together, this paper proposes that the house of Jacob in Isaiah 48:1-2, could be understood as addressing a sixth century Judahite community in the Benjaminite region, perhaps in the vicinity of Bethel.

Introduction

Isaiah 48:1-11 comprises a series of harsh statements against the house of Jacob that have caused some difficulty for interpreters over the years. Although some scholars see no issue with the content of Isa 48:1-11 and note pejorative statements directed at Jacob-Israel elsewhere in Isa 40-48, the efforts of others to harmonise the section with other material in Isa 40-55 by attributing particular phrases to later redactors suggests that some uncertainty about these verses persists.[1] The question of 'Where Did Deutero-

[1] See the table of redactional proposals in A. Schoors, *I Am God Your Saviour: A Form-Critical Study of the Main Genres in Is. XL-LV*, VTS 24 (Leiden: Brill, 1973), table VI, 285; and more recent comments in Chris A. Franke, *Isaiah 46, 47, and 48: A New*

Isaiah Live?' as Buttenwieser put it almost a century ago, has been widely debated, but in recent years there have been strong arguments made in favour of a Judahite origin for the core material of the text.[2] This paper accepts these proposals and combines them with textual and archaeological evidence from Judah in the sixth century, in an attempt to approach Isa 48:1-11 in light of issues that may have arisen in a Judahite context at this time.[3]

Literary-Critical Reading, Biblical and Judaic Studies 3 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 173-244, 271. Goldingay and Payne note that verses 1, 12, 20 all start new sections within the chapter, each building on previous verses, John Goldingay and David Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40-55, Volume II*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2006). Due to considerations of space this paper will deal only with 48:1-11, though a broader range of verses will be taken into account in a future research project.

[2] E.g., H.M. Barstad, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Book of Isaiah: 'Exilic' Judah and the Provenance of Isaiah 40-55* (Oslo: Instituttet fur sammenlignende kulturforskning, 1997); H.M. Barstad, *A Way in the Wilderness: The "Second Exodus" in the Message of Second Isaiah*, JSS 12 (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1989); L.S. Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion: The Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40-55*, VTS 139 (Leiden: Brill, 2011); L.S. Tiemeyer, "Geography and Textual Allusions: Interpreting Isaiah XL-LV and Lamentations as Judahite Texts," *VT* 57 (2007): 367-85; M. Goulder, "Deutero-Isaiah of Jerusalem," *JSOT* 28 (2004): 351-62.

[3] All dates given in this paper are B.C.E.

In Part I the paper looks briefly at the arguments regarding a Judahite origin for Isa 40-55.[4] In Part II we consider the archaeological evidence for settlement continuity and growth in the Benjaminite region in the sixth century, before commenting specifically on the situation of Bethel.[5] In Part III we consider Jacob's association with Bethel in

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[4] The term "Isa 40-55" is used in this paper to refer to the core material in these chapters, rather than as a claim of unity for Isa 40-55 as a whole. For observations of redactional levels and editorial developments within Isaiah 40-66, see, for example, J. van Oorschot, *Von Babel zum Zion: Eine literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* BZAW 206 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1993); Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century BCE*, trans. D. Green, SBL Studies in Biblical Literature 3 (Atlanta: SBL, 2003).

[5] "Benjamin" in this paper refers to the cities north of Jerusalem that survived the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586. The region of Benjamin seems to have had fairly fluid borders for most of its existence and as such, the exact relationship between Benjamin and Judah after the fall of the northern kingdom, and thereafter in the seventh-fifth centuries is as yet unclear. Notable works on the subject include Klaus-Dietrich Schunck, *Benjamin: Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Geschichte eines israelitischen Stammes,* BZAW 86 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1963); Klaus-Dietrich Schunck, "Benjamin," *ABD* 1:671-73; Philip R. Davies, "The Trouble with Benjamin," in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld*, ed. Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim and W. Brian Aucker, VTS 113 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 93-111; Philip R. Davies, "The Origin of Biblical Israel," in *Essays on Ancient Israel in its Near Eastern Context: A Tribute to Nadav Na'aman*, ed. Y. Amit, E. Ben Zvi, I. Finkelstein and O. Lipschits (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 141-49;

light of recent studies regarding the development and use of the Jacob and Abraham
traditions in the exilic period. Finally, in Part IV, we return to Isa 48:1-11 and analyse it
in light of the preceding sections, proposing to read the "house of Jacob" in light of a
sixth century community in the Benjaminite region of Judah, most likely in the vicinity
of Bethel. In this light, Isa 48:1-11 may be shown to be in keeping with the prophet's
rhetoric elsewhere in Isa 40-55, and in accord with theological and rhetorical
developments in other exilic texts. By focusing on Bethel, and raising the probability of
other Yahwistic shrines and communities within Judah, the paper demonstrates the
likelihood of intra-communal strife within the Yahwistic community in the sixth
century. With regard to the book of Isaiah, this intra-communal strife does not begin
with the returnees from Babylon in Isa 56-66 but, in all likelihood, was present at any
time when the interpretation of the true Israel was up for discussion.

I.   An Anonymous Prophet in Exilic Judah

The difficulty of identifying the location of Isa 40-55 has provoked interest from
scholars since the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[6] Barstad's *Babylonian*

Benjamin D. Giffone, *'Sit at my Right Hand': The Chronicler's Portrait of Benjamin in the Social Context of Yehud*, LHBOTS 628 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016).

[6] E.g. B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902), 336; H. Ewald, *Die jüngsten Propheten des Alten Bundes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1868), 30-31; R. Kittel, "Cyrus und Deuterojesaja," *ZAW* 18 (1898): 149-62; M. Buttenwieser, 'Where did Deutero-Isaiah Live?' *JBL* 38 (1919): 94-112; William H. Cobb, 'Where was Isaiah XL-LXV Written?' *JBL* 27 (1908): 48-64; John A. Maynard, 'The Home of Deutero-Isaiah,' *JBL* 36 (1917): 213-24; M. Haran, "The Literary

Captivity demonstrates well the weaknesses in arguments claiming, or assuming, a Babylonian origin for the text.[7] More recently, Tiemeyer's monograph *For the Comfort of Zion*, has furthered the case for a Judahite origin of Isa 40-55 considerably.[8] She systematically works through the text, demonstrating both where the text appears to betray a Judahite provenance and, equally importantly, where it gives no explicit information but the theology or content of the verses might be closer to a Judahite perspective than a Babylonian one.[9] In a separate study Tiemeyer laid out six reasons for the likelihood of a Judahite author, including observations regarding the flora and fauna referred to in Isa 40-55, the pervading focus on Jerusalem and corresponding lack of focus on Babylon (except Isa 47), and the seeming geographical orientation behind statements such as "go forth from Babylon, flee from Chaldea" (Isa 48:20).[10] On the basis of the trees listed in Isa 44, Sherwin has also argued for a western origin of the text, and the comments of Koops and Zohary on the trees occurring elsewhere in Isa 40-55 (41:18; 44:4, 14; 55:13) are also instructive on this point.[11] A Judahite location also

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Structure and Chronological Framework of the Prophecies in Is. xl-xlviii," in *Congress Volume Bonn 1962,* VTS 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 127-55, esp. 150-55; R. Abma, "Travelling from Babylon to Zion: Location and Function in Isaiah 49-55," *JSOT* 74 (1997): 3-28. See also the works referred to in fn.2 above.

[7] Barstad, *The Babylonian Captivity.*

[8] Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion.*

[9] Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion,* esp. 132-53.

[10] Tiemeyer, "Geography and Textual Allusions," 369.

[11] Simon J. Sherwin, "In Search of Trees: Isaiah XLV 14 and its Implications," *VT* 53 (2003): 514-29; Robert Koops, *Each According to its Kind: Plants and Trees in the*

seems supported in light of recent studies on the patriarchal traditions in the exilic period. Strine has highlighted Ezekiel's polemic against those who remained in the land of Judah and claimed it for themselves, which they expressed via recourse to the promise of the land to Abraham (Ezek 33:23 cf. 11:15).[12] Tiemeyer also notes the use of the Abraham traditions in a range of exilic and early post-exilic texts including Isa 40-55 (Ezek 33:23; Isa 41:8; 51:2; Neh 9:7-8; Isa 63:16).[13] The polemic against Babylon and her gods in Isa 46:1-2 and 47 should also be taken into consideration, as most scholars date the core material of Isa 40-55 shortly prior to the fall of Babylon in 539, on account of the references to Cyrus and the manner in which the prophet predicts the conquering of Babylon. Although Cyrus was gaining momentum during this time, it is still open to question whether a prophet could so openly mock Babylon, and in particular, the Babylonian gods, whilst Babylon was still in control of the exiled groups. With regard to the exiles in Babylon, Strine observes a correlation between proximity and polemic; in his view, Ezekiel says covertly against Babylon what Isa 40-55 can say overtly, which is suggestive of the time difference between the authors and probably also their locations.[14] In this context it seems more reasonable to view the overt polemic

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Bible (Reading: United Bible Societies, 2012); Michael Zohary, *Plants of the Bible: A Handbook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1982).

[12] Strine further argues that Ezekiel polemicizes against a combined Abraham-Jacob tradition, and argues that there is polemic against Jacob in a case of "hidden identity" in Ezek 35-36, cf. C.A. Strine, *Sworn Enemies: The Divine Oath, the Book of Ezekiel and the Polemics of Exile*, BZAW 436 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 177-215, 193-211.

[13] L.S. Tiemeyer, "Abraham – A Judahite Prerogative," *ZAW* 120 (2008): 49-66.

[14] Strine, *Sworn Enemies,* 257-8.

against Babylon in Isa 40-55 as originating in Judah, rather than amongst the Babylonian exiles.

II. Sixth Century Judah and Benjamin

Having briefly outlined the reasoning for approaching Isa 40-55 as a Judahite text, this next section considers some aspects of the historical reality of sixth-century Judah and Benjamin that would have influenced its author and formed the background against which the text was written. To this end, more attention is paid to Benjamin than has been typical of previous studies of Isa 40-55. In recent years scholarship has increasingly begun to focus on the role of Benjamin in the formation of Israelite identity and traditions in the exilic period, which seems a sensible development given that the Benjaminite region became pre-eminent in Judah during this time. This paper takes the view that if we are to argue for a Judahite Isa 40-55 then the role of Benjamin should be taken into account. Middlemas has proposed the phrase "templeless Judah" to refer to the land of Judah in the exilic period, in order to acknowledge the existence of the non-exiles who remained in the land.[15] However, given that the goal of this paper is to raise the possibility that Isa 40-55 was aware of other Yahwistic cult sites functioning in the sixth century, it would be inappropriate to use the term "templeless Judah." Therefore I refer to the land of Judah during the Neo-Babylonian period using the terms "exilic," or "sixth century."[16] In the past twenty years or so, archaeological and historical

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[15] J. Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[16] Given the multiplicity of exiles and exilic communities, the breadth of the term "exilic" can be somewhat difficult when one wishes to speak specifically about a

scholarship has sought to rectify the previous unfortunate lacuna in studies regarding

this period.[17] Through these recent works, it has become clear that although the areas

around Jerusalem, and more centrally in the Shephelah, suffered destruction or decline

immediately after 586, the regions north of Jerusalem, particularly around Mizpah and

Gibeon, did not.[18] Regarding the region of Benjamin, Lipschits observes that

> <EXT> no evidence emerges of destruction at the beginning of
>
> the sixth century, apart from the razing of parts of Tell el-Ful. At
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> all the excavated sites evidence of continuity of settlement exists
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> between the seventh and sixth centuries, and of their existence

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particular time, region, or group, within the ancient Near East in the eighth-fifth

centuries, so where possible in this paper I have endeavoured to use the wordier, but

occasionally more accurate term "sixth century." "Exilic" is used when a broader term

is required.

[17] E.g., O. Lipschits, "Demographic Changes in Judah Between the 7th and 5th Centuries

BCE," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. O. Lipschits and J.

Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 323-76; O. Lipschits, "The History of

the Benjaminite Region under Babylonian Rule," *TA* 26 (1999): 155-90; E.

Gerstenberger, *Israel in the Persian Period; The Fifth and Fourth Centuries BCE*, trans.

Siegfried S. Schatzmann, SBLBES 8 (Atlanta: SBL, 2011); J. Blenkinsopp, "Benjamin

Traditions Read in the Early Persian Period," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-*

Babylonian Period, 629-47.

[18] E.g. G.W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic

Press, 1993), 806-7; J. Maxwell Miller and J.H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and*

Judah (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 426.

throughout the time of Babylonian rule, until the last third of the

sixth century.[19] </EXT>

The material culture of the population that continued to live in Benjamin was

continuous with that of the pre-586 settlements, such that it has proven difficult for

archaeologists to identify any change between early sixth century and mid-sixth century

pottery.[20] Administrative continuity has also been noted at Ramat Raḥel, Mizpah (Tell

en-Naṣbeh) and Gibeon (el-Jib). These observations of continuity are unsurprising,

given that Jeremiah 40-41 narrates the transition of government from Jerusalem to

Mizpah under Gedaliah, and other narratives indicate that people were already leaving

Jerusalem for the Benjaminite region prior to the fall of the city (e.g. Jer 37:11-15).[21]

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[19] Lipschits, "The History of the Benjamin Region," 179.

[20] Lipschits, "The History of the Benjamin Region," 179-80; cf. O. Lipschits, "Shedding New Light on the Dark Years of the 'Exilic Period': New Studies, Further Elucidation and Some Questions Regarding the Archaeology of Judah as an 'Empty Land,'" in *Interpreting Exile: Interdisciplinary Studies of Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. B. Kelle, F.R. Ames and J.L. Wright, AIL (Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 57-90, 66-68.

[21] Cf. Middlemas, *Templeless Judah,* 41-46; Jeffrey R. Zorn, "The Levant During the Babylonian Period," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Levant c.8000-332 BCE*, ed. M. Steiner and A.E. Killebrew (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 825-41, 829; Jeffrey R. Zorn, "Naṣbeh, Tel en-" in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land, Volume 3,* ed. Ephraim Stern (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society & Carta, 1993), 1098-1102; Davies, "The Origin of Biblical Israel," 141-49; H.M. Barstad, "After the 'Myth of the Empty Land': Major

In this light, the lack of any mention of the Benjaminite cities in Isa 40-55 and Ezekiel is striking. Ezekiel has been noted to portray Judah as a desolate and ruined land as part of his polemic against those who remained there.[22] Interestingly, Isa 40-55 does the same, though it has not yet been considered polemical. In Isa 40-55 the only two cities specifically mentioned are Jerusalem and Babylon, while all other cities, and the land of Judah, are portrayed as ruined and desolate (cf. 42:22; 43:28; 44:26; 47:6; 49:8, 19; 51:3; 54:3). Although the prophet's focus on the restoration of Jerusalem is usually assumed to explain the emphasis on Judah's ruin, if Isa 40-55 is considered to be a Judahite text then the omission of Mizpah, Gibeon, Bethel, or any functioning Benjaminite city is noteworthy. In the next section we will turn to a more specific discussion of Bethel, which both illuminates these preceding comments on Judah and Benjamin in the Neo-Babylonian period and also moves the discussion forward into the realms of tradition and polemic.

Bethel

Since 1838 Bethel has been identified with Beitin and, notwithstanding Livingston and Bimson's objection and proposal of el-Bireh, the majority of scholars hold to this view.[23] Beitin was excavated by Kelso in 1954, 1957 and 1960 after an initial sounding

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Challenges in the Study of Neo-Babylonian Judah," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 3-21, 6-11; Albertz, *Israel in Exile,* 82-90; J. Radine, *The Book of Amos in Emergent Judah,* FAT 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 185.

[22] So Strine, *Sworn Enemies*.

[23] D. Livingston, "Location of Biblical Bethel and Ai Reconsidered," *WTJ* 33 (1970): 20-44; D. Livingston, "Further Considerations on the Location of Bethel at el-Bireh,"

by Albright in 1927 and the first campaign by Albright and Kelso in 1934.[24] The

excavations provided evidence of a long history of occupation and use of the site, from

the Chalcolithic through to the Byzantine period, but found no evidence of an Iron Age

temple. In 2009 Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz reanalysed the reports and finds from

these excavations.[25] They noted the difficulty of assigning the pottery vessels to an

original context and, in any case, found that most of the loci were mixed.[26] Finkelstein

and Singer-Avitz did, however, note that much of the pottery the excavators had

identified as sixth century BC had come from loci marked on the excavation plans as

Iron I, and this, combined with the small evidence for Persian-period activity, led them

to conclude that Bethel was most likely very small in the Neo-Babylonian-Persian

periods.[27] Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz note that the lack of destruction layers in the

first half of the seventh century makes dating difficult, but point to the lack of

"unambiguous evidence" for Neo-Babylonian or Persian period settlement to suggest

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PEQ 126 (1994): 154-59; cf. J.F. Gomes, *The Sanctuary of Bethel and the*

Configuration of Israelite Identity, BZAW 368 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 2-7.

[24] Cf. W.F. Albright, "The Kyle Memorial Excavation at Bethel," *BASOR* 56 (1934): 1-

15; J.L. Kelso, "The Second Campaign at Bethel," *BASOR* 137 (1955): 5-10; J.L. Kelso,

"Excavations at Bethel," *BASOR* 19 (1956): 36-43; J.L. Kelso, "The Third Campaign at

Bethel," *BASOR* 151 (1958): 3-8; J.L. Kelso, "The Fourth Campaign at Bethel," *BASOR*

164 (1961): 5-19; J.L. Kelso, *The Excavations at Bethel 1934-1960*, AASOR

(Cambridge: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1968).

[25] I. Finkelstein and L. Singer-Avitz, "Reevaluating Bethel," *ZDPV* 125 (2009): 33-48.

[26] Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz, "Reevaluating Bethel," 36.

[27] Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz, "Reevaluating Bethel," 40-43.

that Bethel was in a state of decline at this time.[28] However, it is important to note that much of Beitin is covered by modern buildings and, as the excavators found no evidence of the temple, this suggests that the main settlement was either beneath or outside modern Beitin and remains unexcavated.[29] In this case, absence of evidence cannot entirely prove absence of historical settlement. Though appreciated, the efforts of Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz to re-evaluate the Bethel material do little to challenge the prevailing view that, whilst the archaeology of Bethel is inconclusive, textual considerations suggest that habitation at Bethel continued in the exilic period.[30]

As noted, contrary to Finkelstein's view that Bethel was in decline from the seventh century, Lipschits' survey of demographic changes in Judah and Benjamin suggests that the decline of the Benjaminite region, including Bethel, began towards the end of the sixth century rather than at the beginning.[31] Although the finds from Bethel are scant for the sixth-fifth centuries, the fact remains that Bethel is in close proximity to Mizpah and Gibeon, the former of which became the new administrative center of the region and experienced some measure of prosperity; the latter attests to settlement continuity and

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[28] Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz, "Reevaluating Bethel," 43-45.

[29] Cf. N. Na'aman, "Beth-Aven, Bethel and Early Israelite Sanctuaries," *ZPDV* 103 (1987): 13-21.

[30] So, for example, J. Blenkinsopp, "Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 93-107, 93-94; Blenkinsopp, "Benjamin Traditions," 643; O. Lipschits, "Shedding New Light," 66-67, 83; cf. Gomes, *The Sanctuary at Bethel.*

[31] Lipschits, "Demographic Changes," 347-51.

growth and continued production of wine.[32] Blenkinsopp has argued strongly for the

likelihood of a Yahwistic sanctuary operating either at Mizpah or Bethel in the sixth

century in view of this social and political shift towards the Benjaminite sites.[33] He

notes that in the incident recorded in Jer 41:4-8 the pilgrims are presented as

approaching Mizpah en-route to the "house of Yahweh"; Jerusalem is never mentioned.

Given it would be implausible to think that the pilgrims were unaware of Jerusalem's

destruction, Blenkinsopp argues that the pilgrims were travelling to a sanctuary in the

vicinity of Mizpah, whether Bethel or otherwise.[34] Middlemas agrees with the

likelihood that a cult centre at Bethel functioned during the period when Mizpah was at

the centre of administration during the exile.[35] Gomes also argues that Bethel continued

in the Neo-Babylonian period and played an important part in forming Israelite identity

at this time.[36] He highlights the importance of the fact that Bethel appears prominently

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[32] Lipschits, "Demographic Changes," 347-48; Lipschits, "The History of the Benjamin

Region," 172-79.

[33] Blenkinsopp, "Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period," 96-98; J. Blenkinsopp, "The

Judean Priesthood During the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Periods: A

Hypothetical Reconstruction," *CBQ* 60 (1998): 25-43; see also Middlemas, *Templeless

Judah,* 133-34; S.M. Langston, *Cultic Sites in the Tribe of Benjamin: Benjaminite

Prominence in the Religion of Israel*, American University Studies VII TRS 200

(Berlin: Peter Lang, 1998), 100.

[34] Blenkinsopp, "Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period," 98-99.

[35] Middlemas, *Templeless Judah*, 134-44.

[36] Gomes, *The Sanctuary at Bethel,* esp. 14, 59, 71-76; cf. Davies, "The Origin of

Biblical Israel."

in the various redactions of both the Abraham and Jacob traditions and notes that

through the reception of the promises of land and descendants to Jacob and Abraham,

Bethel became the locus of two of the most important promises in ancient Israelite

society – promises which made the Bethel cult and its community the inheritors of the

land.[37] Knauf has also concluded that Bethel played an important role in the sixth

century when – by virtue of its continued existence when the Jerusalem temple was

destroyed - its rivalry with Jerusalem was at its highest, and he suggests that it may even

have provided an obstacle for the rebuilding of Jerusalem.[38] It seems, therefore, that

there is some agreement that Bethel probably survived the Babylonian destructions of

586 and continued to function in some form during the sixth century.

Silence as Polemic

Despite the circumstantial evidence, it cannot be denied that neither Bethel, nor any

community around or in Bethel, is explicitly mentioned in the sixth century biblical

texts. Yet the post-exilic texts suggest that habitation at the site did continue, even if it

was reduced significantly from what it was in previous centuries.[39] It thus seems that the

silence of certain biblical authors, particularly Ezekiel, Isa 40-55, Lamentations, and

Jeremiah, may have been part of a deliberate effort to downplay the importance, or

existence, of Bethel.[40] The possibility of hidden, or implicit, polemic as a rhetorical

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[37] Gomes, *The Sanctuary at Bethel*, 67, 70, 86-99.

[38] E.A. Knauf, "Bethel: The Israelite Impact on Judean Language and Literature," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. O. Lipschits and M. Oeming (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 291-351.

[39] See, for example, Ez 2:28; Neh 7:32; 11:31; Zech 7:2.

[40] Or any other functioning Yahwistic cultic site.

strategy has been noted in other biblical texts of this period in several studies.[41] Amit

highlights the story of Micah the Levite in Judg 17 as an example of hidden polemic

against Bethel, observing that the story of Micah is full of place names, but the location

of Micah's house is identified only as in the hill-country of Ephraim; the city is not

named.[42] Given the prevalence of other place names and on the basis of textual

indicators, she concludes that the un-named city is Bethel and argues that Bethel is

singled out for polemic due to its potential to act as an alternative to Jerusalem.[43] Amit

argues that in previous years when Jerusalem was stronger there was no issue

condemning Bethel outright because Jerusalem could be held up as a better alternative,

whereas in the exilic period the uncertainty surrounding Jerusalem, while Bethel

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[41] Hidden or implicit polemic against other figures or groups during this period has been

argued by Strine to be present in Ezekiel, manifested through "ambiguities," "hidden

identities," and "hidden transcripts" cf. Strine, *Sworn Enemies*, 193-211, 228-66; See

also Amit's discussion of anti-Saulide traditions in Y. Amit, "The Saul Polemic in the

Persian Period," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, 647-61; and see

further Y. Amit, *Hidden Polemics in Biblical* Narrative, trans. Jonathan Chipman

(Leiden: Brill, 2000), esp. 93-249.

[42] Y. Amit, "Epoch and Genre: The Sixth Century and the Growth of Hidden Polemics,"

in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 135-53.

[43] Y. Amit, "Epoch and Genre," 139-41. See also Y. Amit, "Bochim, Bethel and the

Hidden Polemic (Judg 2:1-5)," in *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical

Historiography: Presented to Zechariah Kellai*, ed. Gershon Galil and Moshe Weinfeld

(Leiden: Brill, 2000), 121-31, where she views the reference to Bochim as referring to

Bethel.

continued as a ritual center, may have led to the Bethel polemic being expressed differently.[44] Gomes also highlights the reticence of exilic and post-exilic texts to refer to Bethel as a sanctuary or as having any kind of ritual significance, though some form of existence of the city is clearly attested by its presence in city lists and tribal records.[45] He identifies numerous texts that suggest worship continued at Bethel during the Neo-Babylonian period, and observes that despite the silence of some texts, the final redaction of the Pentateuch presents Bethel in a positive light.[46] Middlemas observes a "veiled association of Bethel with matters of a religious nature in Zechariah 7:2" and argues in overall agreement with Blenkinsopp that Zech 7 hints at Bethel functioning as a religious centre before the return.[47] It seems, therefore, that there is an agenda present in the sixth century texts that sought to diminish the importance of Bethel, achieved via deliberate omission. Notably, the majority of these sixth century texts also downplay the importance of Benjamin. Neither Ezekiel, Lamentations, nor Isa 40-55 mention any of the Benjaminite sites and Jeremiah only mentions Mizpah in chapters leading to the emptying of the land (Jer 40-41), and Bethel in a single debateable reference (Jer 48:13). As Jones says, "silence can be eloquent of contempt, but only if that which is ignored is common knowledge."[48] The sixth century writers would have been well

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[44] Amit, "Epoch and Genre," 142, 145.

[45] Gomes, *The Sanctuary at Bethel*, 185-86.

[46] Gomes, *The Sanctuary of Bethel,* 92-95.

[47] Middlemas, *Templeless Judah*, 136; cf. Blenkinsopp, "Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period," 96-99.

[48] D.R. Jones, "The Cessation of Sacrifice After the Destruction of the Temple in 586," *JTS* 14 (1963): 12-31, 13.

aware that Benjamin had replaced Jerusalem as the political and social centre of Judah, so their silence is clearly deliberate. The lack of reference to Bethel in the sixth century texts has been rightly acknowledged. But it should also be acknowledged that the sixth century texts are largely silent about the Benjaminite region as a whole and also have a tendency to omit reference to any other cult centres. In this context, the lack of explicit reference to Bethel or Benjamin in Isa 40-55 cannot be taken as proof that neither Bethel, nor the Benjaminite sites existed during this time. Nor can it prove that the existence of the Benjaminite sites had no influence on the Isaianic author. Rather, the omission of explicit references to Bethel and Benjamin in Isa 40-55 is entirely in keeping with the rhetoric of the other sixth century texts.

III. Jacob and Bethel in the Exilic Period

Continuing with the subject of Bethel, the following section turns to discussions of the literary and theological traditions associated with Bethel, particularly with regard to Jacob. This section is a logical progression of the argument laid out in parts I and II; namely, that if the author of Isa 40-55 should be located in Judah (part I) at a time when the Benjaminite region was prominent and Bethel (and thus its traditions) continued to function (part II) then this ought to have left some trace in the text. It is in this vein that we now focus on Jacob as the main patriarch of Bethel, and a surprisingly dominant character in Isa 40-48.

The literary and editorial history of the Jacob cycles is notoriously complex and cannot be explored here.[49] For present purposes the relevant issue is the association of Jacob

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[49] See for example, Nadav Na'aman, "The Jacob Story and the Formation of Biblical Israel," *TA* 41 (2014): 95-125, 96-100; E. Blum, "The Jacob Tradition," in *The Book of*

with Bethel and the popularity of the patriarchal traditions in the exilic period. That there were traditions associating Jacob and Bethel in the pre-exilic period can be seen from Hosea 12:2-6.[50] The majority of scholars accept that the Jacob traditions were

Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation, ed. C.A. Evans, J.N. Lohr and D.L. Petersen, VTS 152 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 181-211; Jochen Nentel, *Die Jakobserzälungen: Ein literar- und redaktionskritischer Vergleich der Theorien zu Entstehung des Pentateuch* (München: AVM, 2009); Albert de Pury, "The Jacob Story and the Beginning of the Formation of the Pentateuch," in *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Scholarship*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid, SBLSymS 34 (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 51-72; I. Finkelstein and T. Römer, "Comments on the Historical Background of the Jacob Narrative in Genesis," *ZAW* 126 (2014): 317-38, 321-32.

[50] Whether Hosea knew some form of the Genesis textual tradition or drew from oral tradition is still open to debate, but either way the majority of scholars date Hosea 12 to the pre-exilic period; cf. M.A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets, Volume One: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, Berit Olam (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 120; W.D. Whitt, "The Jacob Traditions in Hosea and Their Relation to Genesis," *ZAW* 103 (1993): 18-43; for a Persian period dating see J.M. Bos, *Reconsidering the Date and Provenance of the Book of Hosea: The Case for Persian Period Yehud*, LHBOTS 580 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), although it seems more plausible to posit an early date for some form of the Jacob traditions, which developed over time and increased in popularity in the exilic period, probably as a result of Benjamin's pre-eminence.

likely northern in origin, due to the prominent position of Bethel in the narratives.[51]

The tensions surrounding Bethel's legitimacy contributed to its complex portrayal in the biblical texts. On the one hand, Bethel was reportedly established as a deliberate anti-Jerusalem sanctuary (1 Kgs 12:26-30) and housed one of the much maligned calf statues. On the other hand, Bethel was an ancient sanctuary associated with Samuel (1 Sam 7:16), that retained an important position in the Jacob and Abraham narratives, and seemingly survived both the fall of both Israel and Judah.[52] Additionally, through the setting of the patriarchal traditions in the pre-monarchical period, Bethel laid claim to traditions older than Yahweh's election of Jerusalem; traditions which were independent of the fate of the monarchy. Indeed, if Bethel continued after 586, it is easy to see how it would have presented a challenge to Jerusalem, whose own legitimacy was tied to a fallen monarchy and a ruined temple.

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[51] E.g. Blum, "The Jacob Tradition," 209; K.P. Hong, "Once Again: The Emergence of 'Biblical Israel,'" *ZAW* 125 (2013): 278-88, 285-6; K.P. Hong, "The Deceptive Pen of the Scribes: Judean Reworking of the Bethel Tradition as a Program for Assuming Israelite Identity," *Bib* 92 (2011): 427-41, 429-32; J.L. Mays, *Hosea*, OTL (London: SCM Press, 1969), 170; E.M. Good, "Hosea and the Jacob Tradition," *VT* 16 (1966): 137-51.

[52] G.I. Emmerson, *Hosea: An Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective*, JSOTS 28 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 134-35; see also S.L. Cook, "The Lineage Roots of Hosea's Yahwism," *Semeia* 87 (1999): 145-61, 146; S.L. Mckenzie, "The Jacob Tradition in Hosea xii 4-5," *VT* 36 (1986): 311-22; W.J. Dumbrell, "The Role of Bethel in the Biblical Narratives," *ABJA* 2 (1974): 65-79.

Questions about the nature of the relationship between Bethel and Jerusalem, and more

broadly, Benjamin and Judah, in the seventh-fifth centuries has led to a series of

conversations about the "Emergence of 'Biblical Israel.'"[53] For Davies, the importance

of the Benjaminite sites in the sixth-fifth centuries, at a time when Judah and Jerusalem

were at their lowest ebb, is crucial to the emergence of biblical Israelite identity. Davies

argues that the fall of Jerusalem meant that Mizpah, Bethel and Gibeon became the

primary cities and this impacted Judah's self-understanding of its own identity, such

that the term Israel (which stemmed from Bethel's connections with Jacob-Israel) came

to be used for all Judah.[54] Na'aman agreed that Bethel was likely an important site in

the sixth century but argued, contra Davies, that the term Israel as referring to the

peoples of the two kingdoms is pre-, rather than post-, exilic, due to his view that the

fall of the northern kingdom provided an opportunity for Judah to take over some of

Israel's traditions and claim them as their own.[55] Levin notes that the post-exilic

prophets do not make a distinction between Judah and Benjamin, but he argues that the

redactional development of the story of Joseph in the Pentateuch suggests that a later

[53] N. Na'aman, "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel,'" *ZAW* 121

(2009): 211-24; N. Na'aman, "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel'

(Continued, Part 2)," *ZAW* 121 (2009): 335-49; I. Finkelstein, "Saul, Benjamin and the

Emergence of 'Biblical Israel': An Alternative View," *ZAW* 123 (2011): 348-67; Hong,

"Once Again".

[54] Davies, "The Origin of Biblical Israel," 142-45, contra Finkelstein, "Saul, Benjamin:

An Alternative View," 365.

[55] Na'aman, "Saul, Benjamin (Continued, part 2)," 340-42; cf. N. Na'aman, "The

Israelite-Judahite Struggle for the Patrimony of Ancient Israel," *Bib* 91 (2010): 1-23.

hand has added the theme of a struggle between Judah and Joseph for control over Benjamin, which implies that Benjamin was at the centre of some tension.[56] Following Na'aman's earlier dating and arguments about Judah seeking to take over Israelite traditions, Hong has argued for Judahite appropriation of the Jacob traditions in the wake of 722, and argues that Abraham plays an important role in this regard.[57] He proposes that Judahite scribes reworked the Jacob traditions and placed Abraham ahead of Jacob in order to justify their claim to the land, in much the same way that Sennacherib's scribes placed Aššur ahead of Marduk in an Assyrian revision of *Enūma eliš*.[58] There have been several suggestions that the Abraham narratives contain, in places, a form of implicit polemic against Jacob, seen in the appearance of Jacob's main site, Bethel, in the Abraham traditions (Gen 13:3 and 12:8), and Abraham's reception of a similar promise of land and descendants.[59]

However, although Hong argues for the possibility of Judahite scribes beginning to replace the Jacob traditions with Abraham as early as the seventh century, the

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[56] Y. Levin, "Joseph, Judah and the Benjamin Conundrum," *ZAW* 116 (2004): 223-41, 231, 232-36.

[57] Hong, "Once Again," 285-86; Hong, "The Deceptive Pen of the Scribes," 427-41.

[58] "With a successful program of promoting Judah as the new Israel, Judah in fact could assume and take advantage of all the Jacob tradition as our tradition (because we = Israel)." Hong, "The Deceptive Pen of Scribes," 438-40, 438 fn. 43. See also, Finkelstein and Römer, "Comments on the Historical Background," 319, 332-34.

[59] Knauf, "Bethel," 322-23; cf. Na'aman "The Jacob Story," 118; Hong, "The Deceptive Pen of Scribes," 439.

importance of Abraham in exilic texts is much more commonly attested.[60] Recently

Römer, Tiemeyer, Strine and Rom-Shiloni have all commented upon the importance of

the reference to Abraham in Ezekiel 33, where Ezekiel refutes the Judahite

community's use of the Abraham traditions to claim ownership of the land.[61] Tiemeyer

has emphasised the importance of the recurring theme of Abraham in a range of

Judahite exilic texts, and Strine has argued for the existence of a combined Abraham-

Jacob tradition, though Römer rightly notes that Ezek 33 refers to the Judahite

community's use of Abraham as "one" with no mention of Jacob, nor of the stylized

"Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" triad.[62] Tiemeyer argues that Isa 41:8 and 51:2 affirm that

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[60] E.g. J. Van Seters, "Confessional Reformulation in the Exilic Period," *VT* 22 (1972):

448-59; N. Na'aman, "The Jacob Story and the Formation of Biblical Israel," *TA* 41

(2014): 95-125.

[61] T. Römer, "Abraham Traditions in the Hebrew Bible outside the Book of Genesis," in

The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation, 159-81, 162-63;

Tiemeyer, "Abraham"; Strine, *Sworn Enemies*; Rom-Shiloni presents the discussion in

terms of in-group and out-group claims and configurations, cf. Dalit Rom-Shiloni,

Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts Between the Exiles and the People who

Remained (6th-5th Centuries BCE) LHBOTS 543 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark,

2013), 144-56; see also J. Blenkinsopp, "Judeans, Jews, Children of Abraham," in

Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an

International Context, ed. O. Lipschits, G.N. Knoppers and M. Oeming (Winona Lake:

Eisenbrauns, 2011), 461-83, 471-73.

[62] Tiemeyer, "Abraham," 65; Strine, *Sworn Enemies*, 177-215; Römer, "Abraham

Traditions," 162-63. Whether one views the patriarchal traditions as combined or

the Abraham traditions were associated with the community in Judah, but in contrast to Ezekiel, the Isaiah references support the Judahite community's claims to the land.[63] If so, then this would serve as further support for a Judahite origin of Isa 40-55. However, the fact cannot be escaped that in Isa 40-55 the references to Jacob-Israel far outweigh those to Abraham; it is Jacob that must be approached as the central figure of Isa 40-49:6.[64] Polliack has argued that the author of Isa 40-55 uses Jacob predominantly because his story is marked by more struggle and transformation than that of Abraham, and thus she concludes an exilic audience would have found more relevance in Jacob's story.[65] However, although Jacob's story does, admittedly, have struggle as a central motif that may have been attractive to the author of Isa 40-55, the better attested tendency of other exilic groups to prefer Abraham somewhat detracts from Polliack's emphasis on Jacob's relevance as opposed to Abraham's. The question that arises, then, is how to situate Isa 40-55's use of Jacob in an exilic context where Abraham was

competing during the Babylonian exile, it is clear that the traditions themselves and the books that used them were continually developing throughout the sixth century and later.

[63] Tiemeyer, "Abraham," 56-7.

[64] Römer has even questioned whether the Abraham references in Isa 41:8 and 51:2 are part of a later redactional layer seeking to unify themes across the book of Isaiah, and are perhaps later than Isa 40-55. Abraham occurs elsewhere in Isa 29:22; 41:8; 51:2 and 63:16. Cf. Römer, "Abraham Traditions," 169-71.

[65] M. Polliack, "Deutero-Isaiah's Typological Use of Jacob in the Portrayal of Israel's National Renewal," in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. C. Reventlow and Y. Hoffman, JSOTS 319 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 72-110, 79.

becoming a figurehead for the Judahite exilic community, while Jacob had been previously associated with northern Israel and Bethel. Perhaps the answer lies in Benjamin. As noted above, the Benjaminite region survived the destruction of Jerusalem and it is entirely probable that, in the wake of 586, Benjaminite traditions would have been strengthened by the legitimacy of survival. It seems possible that a community in Benjamin, perhaps around Bethel, may have claimed legitimacy via Jacob, much as others claimed legitimacy via Abraham. While Jacob was more closely linked to the regions north of Jerusalem, Abraham seems to have been more closely connected to Jerusalem and the area south of it, as a result of his connections with Hebron and the southern tribes. Given the disparity between the functioning cities north of Jerusalem and the destroyed and empty ones in the south, it seems entirely possible that there may well have been multiple communities in Judah claiming ownership of the land via recourse to different Judahite traditions.

Summary of Parts I-III

Part I briefly outlined the case for approaching Isa 40-55 as having originated in Judah. Part II noted that the archaeology of sixth century Judah attests to settlement continuity in the Benjaminite region, and noted arguments that Bethel may well have continued in use during the sixth century. Part II also outlined scholars' observations of some sixth century texts engaging in hidden or silent polemic against Bethel, and observed the tendency in other sixth century texts to avoid mentioning the Benjaminite sites or any cultic sites altogether. Part III highlighted Jacob's associations with Bethel, and noted suggestions of a measure of competition between the Jacob (formerly northern) and Abraham (southern) traditions in the seventh-sixth centuries. Part III also noted the

increasing popularity of the Abraham traditions in Judah during the exilic period and proposed that the Jacob traditions may have found more popularity in the Benjaminite region, to which he had been historically closely connected. With this historical and rhetorical context in mind we shall now turn to Isaiah 48:1-11.

IV. Isaiah 48:1-11 and the House of Jacob

A more detailed study would explore all the references to Jacob in Isa 40-55 in light of the preceding discussions in parts I-III of this paper. However, within the scope of the present discussion it is possible to focus on only one section here; remaining material will have to await future investigation.[66] Isaiah 48:1-11 has been selected for

[66] For an overview of the occurrences of Jacob in Isa 40-66 see H.G.M. Williamson, "Jacob in Isaiah 40-66," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Chronological and Thematic Development in Isaiah 40-66*, ed. L.S. Tiemeyer and H.M. Barstad, FRLANT 255 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 219-31. I am grateful to Professor Williamson for providing me with a copy of his article. See also Gary N. Knoppers, "Did Jacob Become Judah?: The Configuration of Israel's Restoration in Deutero-Isaiah," in *Samaria, Samarians, Samaritans: Studies on Bible, History and Linguistics*, ed. Józef Zsengellér, Studia Judaica 66/Studia Samaritana 6 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 39-68. In this article Knoppers argued that some of the references to Jacob-Israel in Isa 40-55 have a much broader audience in view than others (cf. 43:1-7; 45:22-25; 46:3-4; 49:1-6) and his article cautions against the tendency to view all the Jacob-Israel references as having a single narrow audience. Interestingly, he raises the possibility that the "tribes of Jacob" in 49:6 need not necessarily refer to the old ancestral traditions, but, rather, could demonstrate acknowledgment of the complicated diaspora

consideration as, firstly, 48:1-2 constitutes the most specific identification of the house

of Jacob in Isa 40-55, and, secondly, 48:1-11 has led to some difficulties for

commentators. Despite the prevalence of the term Jacob and its common parallelism

with Israel in Isa 40-55, the term "house of Jacob" occurs only once elsewhere (46:3).[67]

Given that Jacob-Israel are such common terms in Isa 40-55, yet the "house of Jacob"

only occurs twice and the "house of Israel" only once, when these houses do appear

they likely have a more specific agenda than the broader Jacob-Israel references found

numerously elsewhere.

Commentators who retain the majority of the passage as original to a sixth century

prophet have noted that in chapter 48 the tension between prophet and audience,

previously only hinted at (40:18-20, 27; 43:22-28; 44:9-20; 45:9-11; 46:5-12), now

comes to the fore.[68] Not only does the prophet speak in a harsher tone than before but

the passage occurs at a turning point in the book. Franke emphasized the pivotal nature

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demographics (p. 67). To be clear, in arguing that Isa 48:1-11 has a specific referent, I

do not deny that the audience/group referred to as Jacob-Israel elsewhere may be far

broader; I am merely arguing that the house of Jacob in Isa 48:1 may be one part of this

greater whole.

[67] The term "house of Jacob" only occurs elsewhere in Isaiah in 2:3, 5, 6; 8:17; 10:20;

14:1; 29:22; 46:3; 58:1, while "house of Israel" occurs only in 5:7; 8:14; 14:2; 46:3;

63:7.

[68] J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*,

AB 19A (New York, 2000), 287; K. Jeppesen, "From 'You, My Servant' to 'The Hand

of the Lord is with My Servants': a Discussion of Is. 40-66," *SJOT* 4 (1990): 113-29,

115-16.

of chapter 47 and notes that in 40-46 Jacob-Israel lives in fear and oppression, whereas in 47, "the theme of downtrodden Israel is replaced by the prophecy of downtrodden Babylon."[69] Elsewhere, Williamson has suggested that 49:1-6 is another pivotal point; whereas in chapters 40-48 there were indications that the servant was Jacob-Israel (41:8-10; 44:1, 2, 21; 45:4; 48:20), he argues that in 49:3 the statement "you are my servant" functions as a re-designation of the servanthood which did not come to fruition with Jacob-Israel and is now passed to an individual or group whom Yahweh hopes will be more successful.[70] It seems significant that the harshest passage against the house of Jacob occurs between the vivid image of the fall of Babylon (47) and a potential re-designation of the servant (49:1-6). Notably, after 49:6 the figure of Jacob-Israel largely disappears from the text and is replaced by Zion-Jerusalem.

In 48:1-2 the house of Jacob are identified in a few ways; they are "called by the name of Israel," but "came forth from the loins (or waters) of Judah" (וממי יהודה יצאו), they "swear by the name of Yhwh" and "invoke the God of Israel, but not in truth or righteousness."[71] They "call themselves after the holy city" and "lean on the God of Israel." Notably these verses are the first time in Isa 40-55 that Jacob is explicitly

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[69] Chris A. Franke, "The Function of the Satiric Lament over Babylon in Second Isaiah (xlvii)," *VT* 41 (1991): 408-18, 410-11.

[70] Williamson, "Jacob in Isaiah 40-66," 224; see further H.G.M. Williamson, *Variations on a Theme: King, Messiah and Servant in the Book of Isaiah* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 147-55, 148.

[71] Commentators are divided on whether to render ממי יהודה with MT as 'waters of Judah' or to emend with BHS' suggestion of ממעי יהודה – 'womb/loins of Judah'. Either way the emphasis is on the group's close relationship with Judah.

associated with the community of Judah, and the emphasis here is that regardless of the

group in question calling themselves Israel, the house of Jacob are inherently Judahite.

It is interesting that the author emphasises this point, as we would have expected the

house of Jacob to be from Judah and thus not requiring emphasis.[72] Nataf's observations

are pertinent here; he notes that the very fact that Jacob has two names – Jacob/Israel -

is a deviation from the usual biblical type scene whereby things have one name and if a

new name is given it usually replaces the old (e.g. Abram-Abraham).[73] Nataf argues that

by retaining the old name (Jacob) alongside the new name (Israel), the bible maintains a

dual legacy of Jacob.[74] It seems that Isa 48:1 uses this dual legacy inherent in the

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[72] Although this could be seen as a comment aimed at the Babylonian exiles who sought

to distance themselves from the Judahites – and Ezekiel's use of the phrase "house of

Israel" does spring to mind – the reference to the group calling themselves after the

"holy city" perhaps does not fit so well with the exiles, who had a tendency to portray

Jerusalem and the cities of Judah as corrupt and sinful. Whybray argued that Jacob-

Judah-Israel in 48:1 has the whole nation in view and not merely the Judeans, though

the specificity of the identification of the group seems to work against this, cf.

Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 127. Differently, Watts has argued that those called by the

name of Israel in 48:1 are those who have participated in covenant ceremonies, J.D.W.

Watts, *Isaiah 34-66: Word Biblical Commentary Volume 25* (Nashville: Thomas

Nelson, 2000), 722. Schoors emends the verse because of its uniqueness, in Schoors, *I

Am God Your Saviour*, 286, but this seems unnecessary.

[73] Francis Nataf, "What's in a Name? Ya'akov and/or Yisrael," *JBQ* 40 (2012): 241-46.

[74] Nataf, "What's in a Name?" 46.

character of Jacob to state that the house of Jacob is still caught up in Jacob's sin.[75] For

the author, although the house of Jacob may have changed their name to Israel and

claimed a new identity, they were still intertwined in the old heritage of Jacob, as shown

by the illegitimacy of their cultic actions.

Kratz has argued that the author of Isa 40-55 is aware of a difference still existing

between Israel and Judah, as he views 48:1 as the prophetic author saying that only the

Judeans who come out of the waters of Judah are called by the name of Israel, and so

the author uses the title "house of Jacob" to address the nation as a whole in order to

level out the geographical and political differences.[76] Although Kratz seems correct in

his observation that the use of Jacob-Israel in Isa 40-55 may well entail an effort to level

out geographical and political differences between Judahite groups, the reference to the

house of Jacob in 48:1-11 seems more specific. The reference to the house of Jacob

having come from the waters, or loins, of Judah makes it seem unlikely that the entire

community are envisaged as the addressee, as do the statements of the following verses.

In 48:1-2 the dismissal of the house of Jacob's swearing by Yahweh and invocations of

the God of Israel are dismissed as non-righteous and without truth, which is at odds

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[75] Contra Kratz, who argues that Jacob in Isa 40-55 represents a new beginning. Cf. R.G.

Kratz, "Israel in the Book of Isaiah," *JSOT* 31 (2006): 103-28, 113. McKenzie argues

the reference in 48:1-2 is an allusion to the changing of Jacob's name, as the reference

to the waters or loins of Judah seem to refer to Jacob as the individual patriarch Steven

L. McKenzie, "Jacob in the Prophets," in *Jacob. Commentaire à plusieurs voix de Gen.

25-36: Mélanges offerts à Albert de Pury*, ed. Jean-Daniel Macchi et Thomas Römer,

Le monde de la Bible 44 (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2001), 339-57, 355.

[76] Kratz, "Israel in the Book of Isaiah," 123.

with the more positive portrayal of Jacob-Israel elsewhere in Isa 40-55. Even in 40:27

(the only time Jacob-Israel speaks), in which Jacob-Israel is critical of Yahweh, he is

not accused of invoking or addressing Yahweh illegitimately.[77] This also seems to

suggest that the criticism of the house of Jacob in 48:1-11 is aimed at a more specific

group than the usual audience addressed by the broader nomenclature Jacob-Israel.

It has long been noted that Isa 48:4's imagery of a neck of iron sinew and the hard

bronze forehead is part of common language signalling obstinacy that is found

elsewhere (Exod 32:9; 33:3, 5; Jer 6:8; Deut 9:6, 13; 31:27; Ezek 3:7-8). But the

references to "things you have never heard" (48:6, 7), the "unopened ear from of old"

(48:8), and the "from birth you were called a rebel" (48:8), have posed something of a

puzzle for commentators. Some have argued that the verses are interpolations, as it

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[77] There might be a similar tone in 43:22-28, wherein Jacob-Israel is criticised for

having brought offerings and sacrifices to Yahweh, but this is a much debated passage.

Goldingay concludes that 43:22-28 addresses the present generation and is designed to

make them aware of their shortcomings in preparation for Yahweh's plan, cf. John

Goldingay, "Isaiah 43, 22-28," *ZAW* 110 (1998): 173-91, but Booij understood it as a

reference to the pre-exilic cult, cf. Thijs Booij, "Negation in Isaiah 43, 22-28," *ZAW* 94

(1982): 390-400. Contrastingly, McKenzie argues that it includes both generations:

when Israel was able to offer sacrifices in the pre-exilic period they did so without

devotion and now they cannot offer them in the exilic period they fail to worship

Yahweh properly, cf. John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation and*

Notes, AB 20 (New York: Doubleday, 1968), 60.

hardly makes sense to state that Israel's ear was not opened "from of old."[78] However, if the house of Jacob in 48:1 refers to a specific group within the broader conception of Jacob-Israel, then there is no contradiction between the harsh statements of 48:1-11 and the message of comfort promised to Jacob-Israel elsewhere in Isa 40-55. 48:6-8 can be understood as directed to a specific group who are singled out for a message of judgement, much like the author singled out those who were tempted by idols (40:19; 41:7, 28-29; 42:17; 44:9-20; 45:16; 46:5-7; 48:5).

That the house of Jacob claimed to know Yahweh's plans (48:5-6; cf. 58:2) suggests some form of cultic activity, which fits well with the idea of these verses being directed to a group based around a sanctuary (perhaps also supported by the reference to the holy city in 48:2). The claim of 48:6-8 that the house of Jacob "never knew" the things Yahweh was about to do and "from of old" their ear was not opened, suggests that the house of Jacob had a long history and was not an entirely new innovation. Furthermore, chapters 46 and 48 both associate the house of Jacob with rebellion (46:8; 48:8), and something similar can be seen in 58:1-2. Scholars usually note that other prophets have similar conceptions of Israel being a rebel from the beginning and some have even suggested links between this verse and Ezekiel or Jeremiah.[79] However, the theme of

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[78] W. Bruggemann, *Isaiah 40-66* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 103; C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, OTL (London: SCM Press, 1969), 196; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, 289.

[79] E.g. Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40-66: Translation and Commentary*, ECC (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2012), 311-12; McKenzie notes the theme of early rebellion is current in the exile, whereas previous prophets (Hos 2:17; Jer 2:2) contrasted early fidelity with current unfaithfulness, J.L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, 96; Oswalt notes that many

rebellion is also found in 1 Kgs 12, where the establishment of Bethel and Dan in opposition to Jerusalem is narrated. Given that Bethel was established as a deliberate act of rebellion against Jerusalem it is possible to read 48:8 as reference to Bethel's origin. It is perhaps also worth note that the Benjaminite cities that survived the Babylonian invasions – seemingly because they surrendered when Judah did not - may well have been viewed as having rebelled against Judah by those within the ruined Judahite cities. The history of the region may also have contributed to it having a rebellious reputation; Benjamin appears to have been closely linked to Judah in the early days of the monarchy, then became part of the northern kingdom, then became part of Judah again, and then survived when Jerusalem did not. As a region, Benjamin seemingly had a habit of changing sides and outlasting the kingdom that controlled it.

Although the figure of Jacob-Israel is pervasive in Isa 40-48 he is not presented as a model of good behaviour. He complains against Yahweh (40:27), displays stubbornness (48:4), and rebellion (43:27; 46:8; 48:8), fails in cultic practice (43:22-28), and perhaps fails in servanthood (cf. Williamson on 49:1-6). Yahweh has punished him (42:24-25; 43:27-28; 48:9-10) and the fact that the house of Jacob still existed was for Yahweh's own sake (48:9-11) and not due to any inherent righteousness or holiness of the group in question. Tiemeyer argued that Jacob-Israel probably refers to a group in Judah, and in light of parts I-III of this paper, I propose that the group referred to as the house of Jacob in 48:1-11 could be understood as a sixth century community in the Benjaminite region, most likely in the vicinity of Bethel.[80]

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commentators interpret this as a reference to the exodus in Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 268; cf. also Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, 290; Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 198.

[80] Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion*, 219-20, 225, 237, 239, 240-43.

V. Conclusions

For much of the sixth century the Benjaminite region replaced Jerusalem as the social and political centre of Judah, and it is highly likely that as a consequence of this newfound importance, Benjaminite traditions would have increased in popularity during this time. This paper has argued that if we are to posit a Judahite origin for the core material of Isa 40-55 then this background should be taken into consideration. I have argued that the house of Jacob in Isa 48:1-11 refers to a specific group within the broader conception of Jacob-Israel in Isa 40-55. This solves some of the perceived inconsistency between Israel's relationship and communication with its God, and the statements of 48:1-11 that the house of Jacob call on Yahweh illegitimately and that they have never known Yahweh's plans. In light of evidence demonstrating settlement continuity in the Benjaminite region, and arguments that Bethel continued to function after 586, combined with the centrality of Bethel in the Jacob and Abraham traditions, I have proposed that the house of Jacob in Isa 48:1-2 be identified with a group in Benjamin, perhaps in the vicinity of Bethel. This may better explain the author's choice of Jacob as the central figure (rather than Abraham), the mistrust of the self-identification of the group in 48:1-2, and the accusation of their Yahwistic actions being illegitimate. Read this way, 48:9-11 serves as an explanation that the preservation of this group - and perhaps the city in which they were based - was not due to its holiness or righteousness, but only because Yahweh chose not to profane his name. Although Bethel is not mentioned explicitly in 48:1-11, or elsewhere in 40-55, this omission is in keeping with other sixth century texts, which omit references to any Yahwistic shrines and tend to avoid mentioning the Benjaminite cities altogether. The region of Benjamin may well have offered some hope to the Judahites in the early years of the exile, and

perhaps the mounting frustration in Isa 40-48 that comes to a head in 48:1-11 speaks to this situation, expressing the failure of this Yahwistic community and thus looking forward to the hope of the new servant and the restored Zion.