6.
Exile and the Forgiveness of Sins

Introduction

When God responds to Moses' request to see his glory, he reveals himself as 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear [the guilty], visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation' (Ex. 34:6-7a). These two sides to God's character appear to be paradoxical in the extreme: this is a God who declares that he forgives iniquity and, in the same breath, also states that he visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the fourth generation. Confronting a deity who seemingly does as he pleases when confronted with human iniquity, Moses' prudent and swift reaction is to bow his head and worship (34:8).

Yet this chapter will argue that it is in the context of exile that God makes himself known as the God who both forgives and judges sin to the third and fourth generation – the narrative of exile in the books of Kings clearly attributes exile to God's transgenerational punishment, and yet at the same time the narrative itself amounts to a confession of the nation's sin, which carries within it an appeal for divine forgiveness, a forgiveness that is promised by Jeremiah and Ezekiel in the midst of the nation undergoing the trauma of God's judgment. Exile thus reveals these two aspects of God's character as paradoxical rather than contradictory.

However, this hope that the nation will be forgiven and restored to its homeland raises other questions: To what extent is the forgiveness of sins to be equated with the return from exile? What is the relationship between Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's visions of national restoration and the accompanying call to individual accountability? Does the promise of a new covenant entail a commitment on God's part that he will no longer punish sin to the third and fourth generation? These are the questions that will also be explored in this chapter.

Forgiving and Punishing Sin to the Third and Fourth Generation

The first part of God's self-revelation to Moses, in which he declares himself to be merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, is frequently cited elsewhere in the scriptures:[1] Nehemiah records God's restraint in dealing with his wayward people (9:17); the psalmists quote these attributes of God as the basis for an appeal (86:15), or an expression of confidence (103:8) or praise (145:8). Joel refers to these attributes of God in his call for repentance (2:13), while Jonah expresses dismay that God relents from punishing Nineveh because this is the kind of God he is (4:2). Micah's prophecy concludes with an affirmation that the Lord does not stay angry forever: he delights in steadfast love, pardons iniquity and passes over transgression and accordingly he will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham by forgiving the sins of his people (7:18-20).

But that is only the first part of what the Lord says to Moses: he continues, 'but who will by no means clear [the guilty], visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation' (Ex. 34:7b).[2] These words are cited with far

1. Lane lists the following parallels to Ex. 34:6-7: Ex. 20:5c-7; Num. 14:18; Deut. 5:9-11; 7:9; 2 Kings 13:23; 2 Chron. 30:9; Neh. 9:17, 31; Ps. 25:6; 78:38; 86:5, 15; 99:8; 103:8; 106:45; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; 145:8; Jer. 30:11; 32:18; Dan. 9:9; Joel 2:13; Nah. 1:3; Mic. 7:18-20; Sir. 2:11; 2 Esdr. 7:132-40; CD 2:2-13; Lk. 1:50, 58, 72, 78; 10:37; Rom. 9:15-16: *Compassionate but Punishing God*, p.1, n.1. Washington adds Ps. 103:3-4; Lam. 3:22, 32; Isa. 54:9-10; Jonah 4:2; Dan. 9:4: H.C. Washington, 'The Lord's Mercy Endures Forever: Toward a Post-Shoah Reading of Grace in the Hebrew Scriptures', *Interpretation* 54 (2000), pp.135-145 (pp.140-141); cf. also R.C. Van Leeuwen, 'Scribal Wisdom in the Book of the Twelve', in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (ed. L.G. Perdue, B.B. Scott and W.J. Wiseman; Louisville: W/JKP, 1993), pp.31-49.
2. Widmer argues that the Lord visiting the iniquity of the fathers on successive generations is not concerned with punishment, but with examining or assessing the moral standing of subsequent generations before taking appropriate action: *Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, pp.192-201. However, punishment is unambiguously in view when iniquity is visited upon the world and the wicked (Isa. 13:11), the king of Babylon (Jer. 25:12), Jehoiakim, his children and his servants (Jer. 36:31), and the altars of Bethel (Amos 3:14). Punishment seems to be an integral aspect of visiting iniquity. Instinctively we would want to protest that children and grandchildren of wrongdoers should have a chance to avoid punishment by their own righteous behaviour: our sense of justice demands that God investigate the moral behaviour of a generation before punishing it. Whether that can be exegetically grounded in Ex. 34:7 is debatable, though it may be implied in the second commandment (Ex. 20:5; Deut. 5:9), in which

less frequency: they are found in the second commandment (Ex. 20:4-6; Deut. 5:5-10); Moses cites them when praying for the nation after they refuse to enter Canaan (Num. 14:18) and Jeremiah recognises their awful truth as he sees the plight of Jerusalem under siege (32:18-24).

What is the relationship between the two sides of God's character? According to the MT of Ex. 34:6-7, the Lord responds to iniquity in forgiveness and in judgment with no apparent discrimination between the two. Although English translations universally follow the Septuagint (οὐ καθαριεῖ τὸν ἔνοχον) by inserting the word 'guilty' into the text to clarify the sense, the original Hebrew simply juxtaposes the declaration that the Lord forgives iniquity and transgression and sin[1] with the apparently contradictory affirmation that he will by no means refrain from punishing, but will visit the iniquity of the fathers on their children for generations to come.[2] There is no indication as to whose sin will be forgiven and whose will be punished:

נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה פֹּקֵד
עֲוֹן אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל־שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל־רִבֵּעִים

The enigma of these contrasting assertions that the Lord forgives and also visits iniquity on subsequent generations can be resolved in part by interpreting Ex. 34:6-7 in the wider context of the book of Exodus. In Exodus, the preceding reference to God punishing sin to the third and fourth generation is part of the second commandment prohibiting idolatry, which pronounces this judgment on those who hate God (20:5; cf. Deut. 5:9). If Ex. 34:6-7 is read in the light of the second commandment, the distinction between forgiveness and judgment is clarified: those who love the Lord and keep his commands have their sins forgiven,[3] whereas it is those who hate him who are punished from one

transgenerational punishment is visited on those who hate the Lord and steadfast love is shown to those who love him; cf. M. Weinfield, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), p.318. In 2 Kings 22:15-20 it seems that Josiah can temporarily stave off the judgment coming on the nation on account of Manasseh's sin (23:26); cf. Jos. *Ant* 10.60-61. Had his children followed in his footsteps, one can only speculate as to whether the fate of the nation might have been averted.

1. J.L. Kugel cites Tosefta *Yoma* 4.13, interprets the emphatic double negative וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה (34:7) as 'cleansing he will not cleanse', meaning that God will cleanse or forgive three times – iniquity, transgression and sin – but thereafter he will not cleanse: *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As it Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp.740-741.
2. Cf. W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), pp.269-272.
3. Citing Ex. 20:5-6; Deut. 7:9; *Tg Onq.* Ex. 34:7; Sir. 5:6-7, Kugel makes the point

generation to the next.[1] If the Lord forgives his people in faithfulness to his covenant relationship with them,[2] idolatry breaks that covenant and so the iniquity of idolaters is visited on subsequent generations.

The reference to 'not clearing [the guilty]' in Ex. 34:7 also echoes the third commandment, which forbids taking the name of the Lord in vain, 'for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain' (Ex: 20:7; Deut. 5:11):

לֹא יְנַקֶּה יְהוָה אֵת אֲשֶׁר־יִשָּׂא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ לַשָּׁוְא

This indicates that it is also those who misuse the name of the Lord who will be punished, rather than having their iniquity forgiven. The sense of Ex. 34:7 may thus be clarified by virtue of these allusions to the preceding Decalogue.

The LXX translation does not only clarify the sense of Ex. 34:6-7 MT by inserting τὸν ἔνοχον to make it clear that it is the guilty who suffer transgenerational punishment. It also adopts an over-literal translation of the Hebrew **נשׂא** in Ex. 34:7: rather than understanding the Hebrew **עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה נִשָּׂא** as an idiom for forgiveness, the LXX uses the verb ἀφαιρέω to convey the sense that the sins are literally 'carried away' – which does yield, of course, an entirely suitable metaphor for forgiveness:

ὁ θεὸς οἰκτίρμων καὶ ἐλεήμων μακρόθυμος καὶ πολυέλεος καὶ ἀληθινὸς

καὶ δικαιοσύνην διατηρῶν καὶ ποιῶν ἔλεος εἰς χιλιάδας ἀφαιρῶν ἀνομίας καὶ ἀδικίας καὶ ἁμαρτίας καὶ οὐ καθαριεῖ τὸν ἔνοχον ἐπάγων ἀνομίας πατέρων ἐπὶ τέκνα καὶ ἐπὶ τέκνα τέκνων ἐπὶ τρίτην καὶ τετάρτην γενεάν.

that 'the "thousands" mentioned by God were the "good" sinners, people who, although they sinned, were sorry and sought to repent': *Traditions of the Bible*, p.725.

1. Ex. 34:6 reverses the order of divine attributes found in Ex. 20:5, inasmuch as in the revelation to Moses the mercy and grace of the Lord precede the warning of divine visitation. From this Widmer deduces 'a radical shift from an emphasis on divine jealousy to an emphasis on divine mercy, grace and loyalty without denying justice': *Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, pp.184-185; cf. T.B. Dozeman, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), pp.737-739.
2. Sakenfeld suggests that *hesed* here suggests a meaning 'so great in faithfulness that [the Lord] is willing even to forgive breach of relationship': K.D. Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), p.119. That may well be true of *hesed*, but it cannot be established on the basis of this text. Citing Sakenfeld, Moberly notes that Ex. 34:6-7 differs from Ex. 20:5 in that there is no stipulation of an obedient response on Israel's part for receiving *hesed* from the Lord, and argues from this that Yahweh's mercy to Israel is independent of their response: *Mountain of God*, p.88.

God's revelation of himself to Moses in Ex. 34:6-7 takes place in the aftermath of the golden calf incident, when Israel have already created and bowed down to a graven image and in so doing have broken the second commandment (not to mention the first), thereby inciting the jealousy of the Lord who visits such iniquity on subsequent generations. God threatens to consume them (Ex. 32:9), but this drastic course of action is forestalled by Moses' prayer (32:31-32), in response to which the Lord declares that he will blot out of his book those who have sinned against him and says that on the day he visits his people he will visit their sin upon them, which he does by sending a plague on the people (32:33-35). It is because the Lord says he will not go with his people (33:3) that Moses entreats the Lord to accompany them on their journey, and having received a favourable answer to his prayer he asks the Lord to show him his glory (33:12-18). God declares that he will make all his goodness pass before Moses, proclaiming his name, the Lord: 'And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy' (33:19). Thus, in the immediately preceding context of Ex. 34:6-7, the distinction between those who receive mercy and grace and those who are punished to the third and fourth generation is ascribed to the sovereign will of God. The potential arbitrariness of this divine decision is qualified by the recognition that these words are uttered in response to a scenario in which, through their idolatry, the people have placed themselves in the category of those who are under God's judgment for generations to come.[1] Given this setting, ascribing the decision between mercy and judgment to the sovereignty of God has the effect of giving hope to those who would otherwise be condemned, rather than undermining any confidence God's people might have in his mercy and grace.[2]

Nevertheless, God's revelation of himself to Moses makes it clear that he has complete autonomy to forgive iniquity or to punish it to the third and fourth generation: the reality of God's judgment means that one dare not presume on forgiveness, while the reality of forgiveness means that one should never give up hope of receiving mercy. On this occasion, God determines that he will forgive and declares that he will make a covenant with the people (Ex. 34:9).

1. Aaron also takes the name of the Lord in vain by legitimising the celebrations that followed the making of the calf by declaring that they would be a feast 'to the Lord' (Ex. 32:5).
2. In direct contrast, Nah. 1:3 draws on Ex. 34:6-7 to declare that the Lord is slow to anger, but he will by no means refrain from punishing as a prelude to a declaration of judgment on Nineveh.

The Narrative of Exile

After the golden calf incident, throughout the narrative history of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the Lord keeps covenant with his people, despite their failure to trust him when it came to entering the land of Canaan and despite their repeated doubting and complaining in the desert. In Deuteronomy Moses renews the covenant with the people in the land of Moab and warns against the dangers of tolerating complacency: if someone turns away to worship idols, hearing the words of the covenant, but thinking they can get away with the stubbornness of their heart, they will find that the Lord will not be willing to forgive them, but instead will single them out and bring upon them the curses of the covenant and blot out their name from under heaven (Deut. 29:19-21). Their attitude will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike; the root of their complacency will bear poisonous and bitter fruit for the nation as a whole and the result of abandoning the covenant will be that the Lord will send them into exile and turn their land into a barren waste of brimstone and salt, where nothing can grow (29:22-28). Furthermore the Lord predicts that after Moses' death the people will whore after foreign gods in the land they are entering and they will forsake him and turn to other gods and serve them, thereby breaking the covenant that he has made with them (Deut. 31:16, 20). At this early stage in the narrative sequence of God's dealings with his people, Deuteronomy predicts the failure of the covenant.

Similarly, at the end of Joshua's life he, like Moses, renews the covenant with the nation and responds to their protestations of loyalty to the Lord by warning them that they will not be able to serve the Lord because he is a holy and jealous God, who will not forgive their transgressions or their sins: if they forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will do them harm and consume them (24:19-20).[1] Ensuing references to forgiveness in the pre-exilic prophets and in Kings indicate that Joshua's warning is not heeded: both Israel and Judah go into exile because of injustice and idolatry:[2] the northern kingdom is the first to break the

1. According to Lundbom, Joshua's words to the people at Shechem summarise Deuteronomistic theology: 'if you disobey the covenant, God will *not* forgive your sins; instead he will punish you': J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 3 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1999-2004), vol. 2, p.471.
2. In the eyes of the Deuteronomists, this period was a history of failure: B.W. Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), pp.165-170. Cf. Koch's provocative claim that 'Die göttliche Vergebung der Sünden spielt in der vorexilischen Israel keine Rolle': 'Sühne und Sündenvergebung', p.219.

covenant with the Lord, and God's refusal to forgive them is evidenced in the prophetic books of Amos, Hosea and Jonah. After the division of the kingdom, Amos exercises a prophetic ministry in the north during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753). Amos has visions of the judgment of God coming upon the land in the form of a plague of locusts and he asks the Lord God to forgive because Jacob is so small and the Lord relents (7:1-3). The scenario is repeated with a vision of judgment by fire, but in the third vision Amos sees a plumb line and whereas the significance of that is not spelt out, it is apparent that setting the plumb line alongside the people of Israel exposes their shortcomings[1] and the Lord pronounces judgment: the high places of Isaac will be made desolate and the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste and the Lord himself will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword (7:7-9). Amos' prayers for forgiveness arguably secure only a temporary reprieve from judgment: on account of their apostasy and sin, the northern kingdom of Israel is defeated by Assyria and the nation goes into exile in 722.

Hosea exercised his ministry in the same period and portrays the Lord agonizing over Israel like a husband over an unfaithful wife or a father over a wayward child. In astonishingly anthropomorphic imagery the Lord oscillates between wanting to exact vengeance on his people and being moved to forgive them. Early on Hosea is instructed to name his daughter 'No Mercy' for the Lord will not have mercy on the house of Israel, nor forgive them at all (1:6). The ensuing verse (1:7) reads like a later gloss inserted after the fall of the northern kingdom,[2] declaring that although the Lord will not have mercy on the north, he will have mercy on Judah. Thus even though the book of Hosea itself ends with a promise of Israel's restoration, the redactional addition of 1:7 indicates that, from the perspective of Judah, the story of Israel is one in which forgiveness is ultimately withheld.

The recalcitrance of Israel and their reluctance to repent is also highlighted in the narrative of Jonah, the prophet from Gath-Hepher, who predicted the restoration of Israel's border during the long and apparently prosperous reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). For a prophet to the northern kingdom to have a positive message to declare was a rare occurrence indeed, and the book of Jonah plays on the irony of this particular prophet being sent to Nineveh, the capital of Israel's nemesis Assyria: instead of calling Israel to repent, Jonah is instead sent to proclaim that message to the nation which would be the means of God

1. Amos focuses on the sins of injustice rather than idolatry.
2. So e.g. J.L. Mays, *Hosea* (London: SCM, 1969), p.29; Wolff, *Hosea*, pp.20-21, *contra* D. Stuart, *Hosea* (Dallas: Word, 1987), pp.31-32.

destroying Israel because of their lack of repentance. Not surprisingly, Jonah objects to such a commission, and his extreme reluctance to obey the Lord contrasts vividly with the alacrity and depth of the repentance shown by the people of Nineveh: when they hear Jonah's message the city repents, man and beast alike, in the hope that God may relent and turn from his fierce anger (Jonah 3:9). God's response to their turning from their evil way is indeed to turn from his anger and he turns back from sending upon them the threatened disaster (3:10): the city is spared because of its repentance. Jonah then complains that he knew that this was why he did not want to come in the first place, because he knew that God was gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster (4:2).[1] Though Jonah claims to have known all along that this is what God is like, within the narrative of Jonah this is a truth about God expressed first by the Ninevites (3:9) and demonstrated in God's response to their repentance (3:10).

This only exacerbates the dissonance of God relenting from the disaster he had planned for Nineveh, the very means by which God unleashed the disaster of exile on his own covenant people. God had no covenant with Nineveh: the city was spared simply because God felt sorry for the people he made: 'should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120 000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?' (4:11). These closing words of the book identify God's compassion on his creation as the reason why he relents from disaster. If God refrained from punishing Nineveh because he felt sorry for them, how much more would he have been prepared to spare his own people if only they had repented? Yet Nineveh's readiness to repent at the preaching of Jonah contrasts vividly with Israel's refusal to repent, despite the many prophets the Lord sent to them, and so God, against his better nature, eventually brings the disaster of exile upon them. Jonah can be read as a satire on the fate of Israel, placing the blame for their exile fair and square on their refusal to repent.[2]

1. Lane (*Compassionate but Punishing God*, pp.76-89) notes that Jonah 4:2 corresponds to Joel 2:13 in this word for word adaptation of the grace formula and suggests that Jonah draws on Joel at this point. The origin of this addition to the grace formula probably derives from Ex. 32:12-14, where Moses asks the Lord to refrain from bringing disaster on the people and the Lord responds accordingly.
2. Cf. L.C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp.175-201. The crucial difference that repentance can make is also highlighted in the narrative of Naaman the Syrian who, after his leprosy is healed, takes two mule-loads of earth back to his native country because he

Ten years after the fall of the northern kingdom it looked as if Judah would suffer the same fate when Sennacherib came up against the fortified cities of Judah and took them (2 Kings 18:13) and his army besieged Jerusalem: the inhabitants of the city were staring the prospect of exile in the face (18:31-32). Yet the city was spared – whether because Hezekiah gave Sennacherib anything left of value in the temple (18:14-16) or because of the Lord's miraculous intervention (19:35-37) is not entirely clear. The opening prophecy of Isaiah (1:1-20) can be dated to this period, as Isaiah laments that the people are laden with iniquity: they are the offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly and have forsaken the Lord and despised the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah compares the nation to a diseased body as he sees the country lying desolate, its cities burned with fire. The Lord rejects the offerings and sacrifices of his people and refuses to listen to their prayers because their hands are full of blood. He calls upon them to wash themselves, make themselves clean, seeking justice and correcting oppression. If they respond, then even though their sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. This offer of forgiveness is conditional: if they are willing and obedient then they will eat the good of the land, but if they refuse and rebel, they will be eaten by the sword.

In the event the city was spared in 701 BCE and Isaiah 22:1-14 can also be dated to this time.[1] Isaiah sees the city exultant, full of tumultuous shouts. Whereas in response to the city's reprieve the Lord called for weeping and mourning, baldness and putting on of sackcloth, the people reacted with joy and festivity, eating meat and drinking wine, and living for the pleasure of the moment. The Lord's response is to declare that their iniquity will never be atoned for until they die. As Kaiser observes, 'for Isaiah the events of the year 701 are

determines that henceforth he will offer no burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the Lord. Yet he seeks forgiveness in advance for those occasions when he will support his frail master as he goes to worship in the temple of Rimmon, asking that the Lord will pardon him as he bows in the temple of Rimmon on those occasions, and Elisha sends him on his way in peace (2 Kings 5:15-19). Ostensibly, Naaman is not a man who would qualify for divine mercy, given his oppression of Israel and his attendance at the temple of Rimmon, yet his prayer for advance forgiveness for the offences he knows he will commit is apparently answered, because it comes from a penitent heart. Again, the mercy shown to him serves to highlight the ensuing judgment that comes on Israel for their impenitent idolatry (2 Kings 17:1-18).

1. So Kaiser and Clements, who both argue that vv.5-11 were inserted in the aftermath of the destruction of the city in 587 BCE: Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, pp.136-140; Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp.182-183. The ensuing prophecy against Shebna (22:15-25) corroborates this dating.

no more than a preliminary to the final catastrophe which is to fall upon the southern kingdom, because its people have not seized their last chance of turning to him who has smitten them'.[1]

In a similar vein, Isa. 2:9 contains a prayer that the Lord would not forgive[2] those who are degrading themselves in the worship of idols. However, it is possible that this imprecation was inserted into the text at the time of the exile, thereby making sense of this disaster as God's refusal to forgive his people and bringing the text of Isaiah into line with this interpretation.[3]

The beginning of the end, when it came, started during the disastrous reign of Jehoiakim (609 BCE-598) with multiple incursions of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites and Ammonites (2 Kings 24:1-7). 2 Kings does not hold Jehoiakim responsible for the disaster: instead the blame is pinned on Hezekiah's son Manasseh (697-642), who filled Jerusalem with innocent blood: 'this came upon Judah at the command of the Lord, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh', and the Lord was not willing to forgive: וְלֹא־אָבָה יְהוָה לִסְלֹחַ (24:3-4).[4] Not even the reforms instigated by Jehoiakim's father Josiah had sufficed to turn back the anger of God from his people: even though there had never before been a king like Josiah, who fulfilled the law of Moses by turning to the Lord with all

1. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, p.143.
2. Watts suggests that the meaning of the imprecation וְאַל־תִּשָּׂא לָהֶם is 'Do not let them go up in the pilgrimage!', but this is less likely: J.D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (Waco: Word, 1985), p.35.
3. The phrase is commonly seen as an insertion: Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p.44; O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12* (London: SCM, 1983), p.60.
4. This is a clear allusion to the curse in Deut. 29:19 MT on one described as a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, who hears the words of the covenant but who assumes they will be safe, though they walk in the stubbornness of their heart: the Lord will not be willing to forgive,לֹא־יֹאבֶה יְהוָה סְלֹחַ לוֹ; rather the anger of the Lord and his jealousy will smoke against that person and they will bear the curses of the book of the law and their name will be blotted out from under heaven. Though the Lord singles this individual out for calamity, subsequent generations will see the whole land burned out with brimstone and salt as the Lord has afflicted the land and made it sick: moist and dry alike are swept away. Kaminsky argues that Deut. 29:18-21 MT reflects a late pre-exilic emphasis on the individual and suggests that vv.22-27 were added in the exilic period: J.S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp.133-137. By contrast, the allusion to this passage in 2 Kings 24:4 proposed here entails taking Deut. 29:18-27 as a unit and understanding the individual idolatry of Manasseh to be the cause of the calamities that came on the land in the time of his grandson. For the narrator of Kings, Manasseh is the root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit who brings on himself and on the land all the curses of the book of the covenant.

his heart and soul and might, the Lord did not turn from his anger which had been kindled against Judah on account of Manasseh (23:26-27); in this way, Kings accounts for Josiah's untimely death (23:28-30).

These references to God being unwilling to forgive the sins committed by Manasseh are strategically placed, given that Josiah was Manasseh's grandson and Jehoiakim his great-grandson, which means that they belonged to the third and fourth generation of Manasseh's family respectively. Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin was deposed and deported to Babylon (24:9-16) and his uncle Zedekiah installed as king in his place (24:17): Zedekiah was thus also the fourth generation of Manasseh's family and it was in his reign that the final destruction of Jerusalem took place (25:1-12). Significantly, the narrative of Kings concludes on a note of optimism, with the king of Babylon releasing Jehoiachin and allowing him pride of place among the kings in Babylon (25:27-30) – when read in the light of God's declaration to Moses, this turn in Jehoiachin's fortunes may be taken as an indication that as he belongs to the fifth generation of Manasseh's family, the anger of the Lord has subsided; the account in Kings makes sense of the devastating events surrounding the exile when it is read against the backdrop of God's self-revelation to Moses as the one who punishes to the third and the fourth generation. In the context of the destruction of Jerusalem,[1] these words could be a source of hope to the generation that went into exile. God has acted justly, in accordance with his character, and in its final form the exilic narrative of Kings can be read as a confession of the nation's sin and an admission of their guilt,[2] in the hope that God will forgive and restore them in accordance with the prayer of Solomon (1 Kings 8:46-53).[3]

Chronicles, however, tells the story very differently. In this revision of the history of Judah, the references to transgenerational punishment that characterize the narrative of Kings are elided: the punishment of the fathers is not visited upon the children; instead of being deferred for a later generation, reward and punishment are generally visited upon the perpetrators of good or evil in their own lifetime. Thus the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah are no longer attributed to the foregoing sin of Manasseh (2 Kings 23:26-27); on the contrary, in accordance

1. Spieckermann suggests that the idea of punishment to the third and fourth generation originated in the seventy-year duration of the exile: p.10 in H. Spieckermann, 'Barmherzig und gnädig ist der Herr . . .' *ZAW* 102 (1990), pp.1-18.
2. T.E. Fretheim suggests that the narrative constitutes a confession of sin: 'Repentance in the Former Prophets', in Boda and Smith, *Repentance*, pp.25-45.
3. Cf. Lam. 3:40-42: 'Let us test and examine our ways and return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven: we have transgressed and rebelled and you have not forgiven.'

with its theology of 'immediate retribution',[1] Chronicles accounts for the longevity of Manasseh's reign by recounting that he was captured and taken to Babylon, where he humbled himself in prayer before the Lord and so was restored to Jerusalem and his kingdom (33:10-13).[2] Chronicles' account of Manasseh's reign stands out as a narrated example of a post-exilic rejection of the theology of transgenerational punishment and its replacement with an emphasis on individual repentance as the key to the forgiveness of sins.[3] Indeed, Chronicles rewrites the whole history of Judah in accordance with a theological understanding of God as the one who does not visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, but who rather forgives iniquity, transgression and sin. Such a reinterpretation of the exile and the basis on which God deals with his people is consistent with revisionist prophecies found in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and it is accordingly appropriate to explore how the major prophets understood the relationship between the forgiveness of sins, or lack of it, and the exile of the nation.

Jeremiah

According to 2 Kings 24:2-4, the trials that befell Judah in the days of Jehoiakim were on account of the sins of his grandfather, Manasseh; whereas the verdict of Kings is that Jehoiakim did evil in the sight of the Lord (23:37) – no details of his evildoing are recorded in this narrative. Jeremiah, however, records the king's decision to burn the scroll containing all the words given to the prophet in the hope that each person who heard it would turn from their evil ways so that the Lord would forgive their iniquity and their sin (36:1-3, 23). In response the Lord declares that he will punish Jehoiakim, his offspring and his servants for their iniquity, and he will bring upon them and upon Jerusalem the disaster he pronounced and which they refused to hear (36:31).

It was probably around the same time[4] that the prophet is told to run up and down the streets of the city looking for a single person who lives justly and searches for truth, that the Lord might forgive the city (5:1),

1. Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, pp.76-81, 268-269.
2. The *Prayer of Manasseh* conforms to the Chronicler's understanding of the importance and efficacy of individual repentance: cf. J.H. Charlesworth, 'Prayer of Manasseh', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), vol. 2, pp.625-633; Newman, 'Prayer of Manasseh'.
3. Citing 2 Chron. 12:7; 15:2-7; 30:6-9, 18-19, Klein observes that in Chronicles God responds positively to those who repent: *1 Chronicles*, p.47.
4. So J.A. Thompson, *Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p.234; P.C. Craigie, P.H. Kelley and J. Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25* (Waco: Word, 1991), pp.86-87.

but to no avail: the people have made their faces harder than rock and have refused to repent (5:3), giving the Lord no grounds to forgive their falsehood. Jeremiah himself, aware of their plots to kill him, implores the Lord not to forgive their iniquity or to blot out their sin from his sight; he asks instead that the Lord would overthrow them and deal with them in the time of his anger (18:23).[1] With Jehoiakim's burning of the scroll, it seems that the last opportunity for averting God's impending judgment through repentance has been lost.

Nevertheless, even as judgment falls, this is accompanied by the promise of future forgiveness. In the days of Zedekiah, when the city is under siege by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah is instructed to buy a field in Benjamin, as a sign that fields will again be bought and sold in the land (32:1-15). Jeremiah acknowledges that the Lord shows steadfast love to thousands and that he repays the guilt of the fathers to their children after them (32:18) and ponders why, when the city is under siege because of the nation's disobedience, he has been instructed to buy this field (32:16-25). In response the Lord reaffirms the judgment that is coming on the city (32:26-35), yet also promises that the nation will be restored (32:36-46).

In Jer. 33:1-9, which can be dated to the same period, the immediate prospect of judgment is again tempered by the promise of future forgiveness: a warning that the houses that have been torn down to defend the city against the Chaldean siege ramps will be filled with the dead bodies of the city's inhabitants is followed by a promise that God will bring the city health and healing, prosperity and security: 'I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive the guilt of their rebellion and sin against me':

וְטִהַרְתִּים מִכֹּל־עֲוֹנָם אֲשֶׁר חָטְאוּ־לִי
וְסָלַחְתִּי לְכָל־עֲוֹנוֹתֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר חָטְאוּ־לִי וַאֲשֶׁר פָּשְׁעוּ בִי׃

καὶ καθαιρῶ αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν ἀδικιῶν αὐτῶν ὧν ἡμάρτοσάν μοι καὶ οὐ μὴ μνησθήσομαι ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν ὧν ἥμαρτόν μοι καὶ ἀπέστησαν ἀπ᾽ ἐμοῦ. (Jer. 40:8)

A similar promise of restoration is found in Jer. 50:19-20 (LXX 27:19-20), which is probably to be dated after the destruction of Jerusalem. Israel is a hunted sheep, driven away by lions: first the king of Assyria devoured him, and now the king of Babylon has gnawed his bones (50:17). The prophet pictures the restoration of the nation in terms of

1. Holladay dates 18:19-23 to the period after the burning of the scroll: W.L. Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989-1986), vol. 2, p.530.

them being as a flock of sheep grazing safely on Carmel and Bashan and the hills of Ephraim and Gilead: 'In those days and in that time, declares the Lord, iniquity shall be sought in Israel, and there shall be none. And sin in Judah, and none shall be found, for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant.'[1] As is characteristic of Jeremiah, Israel is included alongside Judah in the promised restoration – as both Israel and Judah suffer the punishment of exile, both are included in the promises of restoration and forgiveness.

The same is true of the two oracles in Jer. 31:27-34 (LXX 38:27-34) concerning what will happen in the coming days: in the first oracle Jeremiah states that the days are coming when God will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of people and animals. God will no longer watch over the nation to pluck up, break down, overthrow, destroy and bring harm; instead he will watch over them to build and to plant. In those days people will no longer have cause to cite the proverb about sour grapes; each person will die for their own sin (31:27-30).[2]

In the second oracle, God declares that the days are coming when he will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah (31:31-34), under the terms of which the Lord promises that he will write his law on the people's hearts, replacing the tablets of stone on which the law was written under the old covenant: then they will be enabled by God himself to keep it. The problem of disobedience, which

1. Raitt argues that in the deliverance oracles of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, '*Forgiveness becomes an integral part of a whole new era of salvation*': T.M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), p.186; cf. pp.184-194.
2. The same proverb is quoted in Ezek. 18:2, and reflects the complaint expressed in Lam. 5:7: 'Our fathers sinned, and are no more; and we bear their iniquities'. This perspective is found again in Ps. 79, which is a psalm of lament and confession after the destruction of Jerusalem. The psalmist asks whether God will be angry forever (v.5) and pleads for the Lord to deliver them and forgive their sins for his name's sake (v.9). Significantly, however, the psalmist also asks not to remember against them the iniquities of their ancestors (v.8): the fate that has befallen the city has happened, not only on account of the sins of the current generation, but also on account of the sins of their fathers, which are being visited upon them in the destruction of the city. On the basis that **רִאשׁוֹן** is an adjective meaning 'former', Tate argues that Ps. 79:8 refers to 'former iniquities' rather than the iniquities of the ancestors: M.E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100* (Dallas: Word, 1990), pp.297-298. However, the construction used here is paralleled in **בְּרִית רִאשֹׁנִים** (Dt. 26:45), where the succeeding relative clause requires the sense 'covenant of the forefathers' whom the Lord brought out of Egypt.

resulted in the breaking of the first covenant, will be resolved. God and the people will belong to each other, and everyone will know him, from the least of them to the greatest, for he will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more:[1]

אֶסְלַח לַעֲוֹנָם וּלְחַטָּאתָם לֹא אֶזְכָּר־עוֹד

ἵλεως ἔσομαι ταῖς ἀδικίαις αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν οὐ μὴ μνησθῶ ἔτι

These oracles of restoration may have been associated on the basis of their identical introductory formulae: 'Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord. . . .' It is debatable how compatible they are, since the statement that each person will answer for their own sin cannot easily be related to the promise that the Lord will forgive the nation's sins and remember them no more. However, the combination of the oracles echoes the Lord's revelation of himself to Moses as a God who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin, but who also visits the iniquity of the fathers on their children to the fourth generation (Ex. 34:6-7). Jeremiah perceived the reality of that principle being worked out as Nebuchadnezzar's siege mounds surrounded Jerusalem.[2] Yet it was in the context of undergoing the outworking of God's judgment against the nation that Jeremiah also received the promise of divine forgiveness.

The combination of the oracles in Jer. 31:27-34 amounts to a pledge that in the coming days God will no longer deal with iniquity by means of transgenerational punishment, but instead, under the terms of the new covenant, he will respond to sin and iniquity with forgiveness. The promised new covenant does not change the nature of God as revealed to Moses in Ex. 34:6-7;[3] on the contrary, it is in accordance

1. Holladay notes that the only previous reference to forgiveness in Jeremiah is in 5:1-3, where the people's lack of repentance precludes God's forgiveness; God is now able to do what he yearned to do before: Holladay, *Jeremiah*, vol. 2, p.199.
2. Jer. 32:17-24; cf. 36:31.
3. According to Kaminsky (*Corporate Responsibility*, pp.141-154), Jer. 31:29-30 does not describe a coming change in God's behaviour, but only a shift in human perception that entails a readiness to admit personal responsibility for sin rather than blaming the previous generation. However, the reference to a 'new covenant' (31:31) does suggest that God will deal differently with his people in the future under the terms of the new covenant. If the text does have the covert aim of advancing a theology of individual responsibility at the expense of an existing theology of collective guilt, it achieves this end by describing a change in the way God relates to his people.

with this revelation of his divine nature to Moses that God has the sovereign freedom to choose to establish a new covenant with his people promising forgiveness of their sins.[1]

Ezekiel

Ezek. 18:1-4 contains the same proverb about sour grapes found in Jer. 31:29-30, and like Jeremiah, he follows the proverb with the assertion that everyone will die for their own sin. This statement remains undeveloped elsewhere in Jeremiah,[2] but Ezekiel expounds the theme at some length. He envisages three generations of men: the first, righteous, the second wicked and the third righteous. In each case, the person who is righteous will live, while the one who is wicked will die for his iniquity (18:5-18). The passage amounts to a clear statement to the effect that a son will no longer be punished for the iniquity of his father.[3] Through repentance, every person has the opportunity to change the outcome of their own life (18:21-29),[4] and on this basis the whole house of Israel is summoned to repentance and to make for themselves a new heart and a new spirit (18:30-32).

Although Ezekiel uses the example of how individuals lead their lives in order to overturn the principle of transgenerational punishment, Joyce argues that the focus of Ezek. 18 is not on individual accountability but upon the nation before exile, who are blaming their fathers for their plight. Since the individuals presented in Ezekiel's test case represent generations of Israel, Ezekiel 'is asserting that if the present generation

1. In this case, Jer. 31:30 can be understood as making the point that the promise of forgiveness does not obviate the principle of personal accountability.
2. Although Holladay accepts that Ezekiel tends to use Jeremiah elsewhere, he argues that the absence of any link between 31:30 and the preceding authentic material is an indication that this verse is a priestly interpolation: *Jeremiah*, vol. 2, p.163. However, it is possible that Jeremiah was not the first to quote and refute the proverb: others may also have countered the proverb with the principle that each person is accountable for their own sin, a line of thought that Jeremiah merely retains, but that Ezekiel develops in a different direction.
3. Cf. also Deut. 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6. It is puzzling that these texts appear to have more in common with the individualistic emphasis of Ezekiel than with the Deuteronomistic context in which they are found. Kaminsky plausibly suggests that 2 Kings 14:6 demonstrates that the original intention of Deut. 24:16 was to eradicate 'the tendency of new kings to purge the rivals' and enemies' families'; as such, Deut. 24:16 does not address divine behaviour, but is intended to stop kings behaving like a deity who has the right to engage in transgenerational punishment: *Corporate Responsibility*, pp.127-129.
4. Cf. Boda, *Severe Mercy*, pp.274-279.

were righteous they would not be suffering; since they are suffering, this must be because of their own sins. Thus Ezekiel's hearers cannot be the righteous sons of wicked men, as they suppose themselves to be.'[1] However, the theme of individual accountability remains an integral part of the passage: the summary verse of Ezek. 18:30 has an inescapable focus on the individual, where the Lord says to the nation that he will judge them, 'each one according to their way': אִישׁ כִּדְרָכָיו.[2] Clearly Joyce is right to highlight the implications of Ezek. 18 for those exiles inclined to blame their own plight on the sins of their fathers, but nevertheless the focus on individual accountability and repentance, as opposed to the principle of transgenerational punishment, is not to be denied.

The concluding summons of Ezek. 18, to 'make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit' (18:31), is taken up in the ensuing promise that he will give his people a new heart and a new spirit (36:26) when he brings them back to their own land (36:24). Here there is no doubt that the focus is on national restoration: God gives to the nation as a whole a new heart and a new spirit. However, this is not incompatible with the individualism of Ezek. 18: this gift to the nation of a new heart and a new spirit will enable each individual member of the nation to exercise the repentance required in Ezek. 18.

God's motivation for doing this is clear: he acts, not for their sake, but for the sake of his holy name, which they have profaned among the nations: God intends to vindicate the holiness of his great name, so that the nations will know that he is the Lord (36:22-23). Here God acts out of a concern for the honour of his name (cf. 20:1-26), the name that he proclaimed before Moses (Ex. 34:5-7). For the sake of his name, God determines that he will act to vindicate his name in the sight of the nations

1. P. Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), p.46; cf. pp.34-60. Kaminsky acknowledges an emphasis on the individual in Ezek. 18, but argues that vv.21-29 serve to summon the people to repentance rather than to signal an evolution from corporate to individual responsibility in this passage (*Corporate Responsibility*, pp.155-178). M. Fishbane argues that Ezekiel sharpens the issue of individual responsibility to deter the Israelites from wallowing in notions of inherited guilt: *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), pp.335-341. G.H. Matties also argues that Ezekiel's focus on the individual serves to reconstitute Israel as the people of God in the aftermath of exile and to call them to responsible decision making as moral agents: *Ezekiel 18 and the Rhetoric of Moral Discourse* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).
2. In his commentary, Joyce insists that this principle of the individual suffering punishment for their own crime in this context means that the present generation is being punished for their sins alone – but this is not the obvious reading of the text: *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (London: T&T Clark International, 2009), p.144.

by restoring his people; it is his sovereign decision, and one that is entirely consistent with the name of the Lord, who will be gracious to whom he will be gracious and show mercy on whom he will show mercy (Ex. 33:20).

While Ezekiel emphasises the importance of repentance that leads to life, the only explicit reference to divine forgiveness is 16:63,[1] at the conclusion of an extended metaphor of judgment: Jerusalem is portrayed as a girl abandoned by her parents at birth, whom the Lord rescues and marries, entering into a covenant with her, but who then commits adultery with all the nations. The Lord in his anger declares that she will be punished as a whore: she will be stripped and stoned and cut to pieces and thus he will sate his fury and his jealousy will turn away; he will calm down and not be angry any more. Yet the prophecy ends on an optimistic note: the Lord declares that he will remember the covenant he made with her in her youth and he will now make a permanent covenant with her. When the Lord atones for all the sins Jerusalem has committed, she will be ashamed of her former lewd behaviour and never open her mouth again:

לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרִי וְבֹשְׁתְּ וְלֹא יִהְיֶה־לָּךְ עוֹד פִּתְחוֹן פֶּה
מִפְּנֵי כְּלִמָּתֵךְ בְּכַפְּרִי־לָךְ לְכֹל־אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂית נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה׃

ὅπως μνησθῇς καὶ αἰσχυνθῇς καὶ μὴ ᾖ σοι ἔτι ἀνοῖξαι τὸ στόμα σου ἀπὸ προσώπου τῆς ἀτιμίας σου ἐν τῷ ἐξιλάσκεσθαί μέ σοι κατὰ πάντα ὅσα ἐποίησας λέγει κύριος.

Ezekiel was among those exiled to Babylon in the initial deportation in 597 BCE and he commenced his ministry then; this oracle appears to belong to the period after the destruction of Jerusalem, because the declaration in v.41, that the city's houses would be burned, allows the actual fate suffered by the city in 587 BCE to intrude into the metaphor (2 Kings 25:9). The destruction of the city also rescues the metaphor from incoherence: unless the Lord merely issues empty threats of vv.39-41, it is no longer possible to make a covenant with a girl who has been stoned to death and hacked to pieces. However, even after the city of Jerusalem has been destroyed, it is possible for the Lord still to speak meaningfully of forgiveness and restoration.

How is one to take the concluding promise of atonement, particularly in the aftermath of the outpouring of rage and anger in vv.39-42?[2] The

1. Raitt (*Theology of Exile*, p.185) also cites Ezek. 20:40, 41, 44; 36:25, 29, 33; 37:23.
2. Schwartz denies any reference to forgiveness here, seeing only a statement that YHWH will cleanse the sacred precincts of the contamination resulting from Israel's sinfulness, so that his Presence can return there: B.J. Schwartz, 'Ezekiel's Dim View of Israel's Restoration', in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives* (ed. M.S. Odell and J.T. Strong; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), pp.43-67, esp. p.49. However, where the Lord is the subject of כפר, it generally refers to the Lord forgiving (cf. Ps. 65:4 [64:3]; 78:38).

promise of forgiveness after giving free rein to such furious retaliation does not equate forgiveness as it is commonly understood: forgiveness entails forgoing wrath and vengeance, rather than giving vent to them. It might be possible to see the Lord atoning for Jerusalem's sins by precisely punishing her in this way,[1] yet that reading of the text does not cohere well with the accompanying promise of remembering the covenant of her youth (v.60). Is it possible that at the end of the oracle the Lord considers and prefers the option of bringing Jerusalem to repentance by forgiving her rather than punishing her? Such a reading of the passage is ruled out by v.41, which makes it clear that the punishment has already taken place: it is too late for the Lord to change his mind now. The best way of taking the passage seems to entail the recognition that abandonment and annihilation are not the end of the story of the Lord's relationship with Jerusalem. His anger, like her sin, has known no bounds in the past, but in the aftermath of all that destruction there is the unilateral promise of an eternal covenant which will entail the forgiveness of sins: when God does this, Jerusalem will know that he is the Lord (16:62); he acts in accordance with his name (Ex. 34:5-7), to forgive as well as to judge.

Isaiah

The prophet Isaiah exercised his ministry in the days of Hezekiah and the crisis of the Assyrian invasion, but the book of Isaiah contains promises of forgiveness which with some confidence can be dated to the exilic period and beyond. The first of these is Isa. 33:24,[2] where it is said that no inhabitant of Zion will say 'I am sick' because[3] the people who live there will be forgiven their iniquity:

וּבַל־יֹאמַר שָׁכֵן חָלִיתִי הָעָם הַיּוֹשֵׁב בָּהּ נְשֻׂא עָוֹן

1. Noting that there is very little forgiveness in Ezekiel, Tiemeyer sees this as an utterly loveless act of ritual expiation, but this perspective ignores God's statement that he will renew the covenant he made with Jerusalem in her youth, when he fell in love with her (16:60): L.-S. Tiemeyer, 'To Read – Or Not To Read – Ezekiel as Christian Scripture', *ExpT* 121 (2010), pp.481-488.
2. Cf. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p.266.
3. Unlike the LXX, the grammar of the MT distinguishes between the inhabitant who will not say 'I am sick' and the people in the city, whose iniquity is forgiven (literally 'borne') by God: there is no causal connection between the two statements. In the LXX it is the people dwelling among them (presumably the rivers and canals of v.20) who will not say they are sick, because their sins are forgiven. The LXX thus explicitly makes forgiveness the basis for the absence of sickness.

καὶ οὐ μὴ εἴπῃ κοπιῶ ὁ λαὸς ὁ ἐνοικῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀφέθη γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἡ ἁμαρτία

This verse comes at the end of a call to look on Zion and see a double paradox: Jerusalem is a tent that cannot be uprooted and a place of broad rivers and streams that is impassable to rowed galleys and stately ships (33:20-22). Seemingly one of these ships has been wrecked: the rigging hangs loose and cannot keep the mast in place or the sail spread, leaving its cargo so much an easy prey that even the lame can help themselves (33:23). The image of the immovable tent is one of permanence: people who live in this city will never be uprooted because the stakes of this tent will never be pulled out and its ropes can never be broken. The tent, a symbol of transience, becomes a symbol of permanence and thereby symbolises a city from which people will never again be sent into exile.

Jerusalem is anything but a place of broad rivers and streams, but Egypt is (Ex. 7:18; 8:5; Isa. 7:18; 18:1; 37:25; Jer. 46:7) and so is Babylon (Ps. 137:1); both are countries to which people either fled or were exiled following the destruction of Jerusalem, and for them it would not have been unusual to see imperial barges or royal ships on either the Nile or the Euphrates.[1] Isaiah subverts the splendour of that sight: the Lord himself will make Jerusalem a place of grand impressive rivers, but the imperial barges of foreign kings cannot pass there because the Lord himself is ruler and king in Zion; their dismasted vessels will be easy prey for anyone who is disabled – not that anyone will be disabled, because everyone living there will be forgiven their iniquity and the absence of iniquity is thought to bring with it the absence of disease. The imagery of dismasted ships denied entry to broad rivers in Jerusalem portrays the destruction of Babylonian splendour and a reversal of the status of exile: because the Lord is the nation's judge, lawgiver and king, he will save them (33:22).

In Isa. 40:1-2 LXX, Deutero-Isaiah's promise of Israel's return from exile and the Lord's return to Zion 'is announced in the language of forgiveness, of sin having been dealt with':[2] λέλυται αὐτῆς ἡ ἁμαρτία[3] ὅτι ἐδέξατο ἐκ χειρὸς κυρίου διπλᾶ τὰ ἁμαρτήματα αὐτῆς. However, the MT does not refer to forgiveness at this point, speaking only of Israel's punishment having been paid now that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins:[4]

1. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, p.428.
2. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, p.270; cf. Janowski, *Sühne*, pp.116-123.
3. The combination of ἁμαρτία with λύω, denoting forgiveness of sins, is also found in LXX Job 42:9; Sir. 28:2.
4. Cf. Lam. 4:22.

כִּי נִרְצָה עֲוֹנָהּ כִּי לָקְחָה מִיַּד יְהוָה כִּפְלַיִם בְּכָל־חַטֹּאתֶיהָ

This means that, whereas the translators of the LXX preferred to interpret the message of comfort entrusted to Isaiah as being one of forgiveness, in the original text the words of comfort only come because the double punishment[1] for sin has been borne by the nation, and bearing the full punishment for sin is not the same as being forgiven.[2] There seems little doubt that the translators of the LXX interpreted the return from exile as the forgiveness of the nation's sins and amended the sense of the MT accordingly. However, this is a secondary interpretation of Isaiah's text: in the original MT the return from exile addressed in Isa. 40-55 was not portrayed in terms of the forgiveness of the nation's sins, but rather in terms of Israel having suffered the full punishment of her sin at the Lord's hands. There is thus an ambiguity in Isaiah's perspective on the restoration from exile that corresponds to the dialectic of God's identity in Ex. 34:6-7: restoration from exile can be seen in terms of forgiveness (33:23-34) or in terms of the nation having borne the righteous judgment of God upon her iniquity (40:2 MT).

The only other passage in the Hebrew text of Deutero-Isaiah that deals with the forgiveness of sins addresses the forgiveness of those individuals who heed the call to repentance (55:1-9). People are invited to come to God because he will make with them an everlasting covenant, the sure mercies of David, who is made a witness to and a leader and commander of the nations. The prophet addresses the people in the plural in v.3, and in v.5 this changes to the singular. It is likely that the individual addressed here is David or his representative, as God declares that he will be glorified by God and will call nations he does not know and nations that do not know him will run to him.[3]

1. The niphal נִרְצָה is used in Lev. 1:4 of a burnt offering being accepted as a means of atonement for the worshipper. In Isa. 40:2 the subject of the passive verb is עָוֹן, which is never used of a sin or guilt offering, and is best understood in this context as 'punishment' (cf. Gen. 4:13). NRSV rightly translates this as 'her penalty is paid'. Anderson suggests that the origins of seeing debt as a metaphor for sin may originate here: *Sin: A History*, pp.43-54.
2. So J. Goldingay and D. Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 2 vols. (London: T&T Clark International, 2006), vol.1, p.70. According to BDB, רצה in this context means that Israel's 'punishment is accepted (as satisfactory)'. The Dead Sea Scrolls have the same reading of Isa. 40:2 as the MT (cf. 1QIsa[a] 33. 7; 1Q8 16. 24; 4Q176 1-2 i 4-6). The preference in English translations for the language of forgiveness here is influenced by the LXX. Cf. Lev. 26:41, which refers to the nation 'making amends' for their sin.
3. However, Goldingay and Payne argue that the nation is being addressed here, noting the switch between second person singular and plural address in 42:18-25; 43:8-28; 44:1-8: *Isaiah 40–55*, vol. 2, p.374.

This is then followed by a call (addressed in the plural again) to seek the Lord while he may be found and to call on him while he is near (55:6), but it is far from clear who is being addressed at this point. The immediately preceding reference to the nations running to David suggests that it may be the Gentiles who are called. On the other hand, it is God's people who have been addressed in the second person plural in 55:3 and it is with them that God makes the everlasting covenant, as part of which the Gentiles will call upon David. It may be that the summons to call upon God is directed to both Jews and Gentiles: everyone who is thirsty is invited, without distinction. In this case, God's people, addressed directly in the second person, are probably the primary addressees, but the nations are included as well.

In Isa. 55:7 LXX a call is issued to the wicked to forsake their way and the unrighteous person their thoughts; let such a person return to the Lord and receive mercy, because God will abundantly pardon your sins. Whereas the MT simply refers to God's abundant forgiveness and makes no reference to sins here (כִּי־יַרְבֶּה לִסְלוֹחַ), the LXX switches from the appeal in the third person singular to the individual wicked or unrighteous person to make a direct appeal in the second person plural: ὅτι ἐπὶ πολὺ ἀφήσει τὰς ἁμαρτίας ὑμῶν. If the above conclusion about the addressees is correct, this appeal is directed to individuals, irrespective of their racial origin, to Jews and to Gentiles, as God tells Jews and Gentiles alike through Isaiah that he will abundantly forgive their sins.

Why does the Lord abundantly pardon? His motivation, according to Isa. 55:8, is beyond us. The summons to repentance is supported by the promise of abundant pardon, which is available because, as the Lord says, 'my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways'. God's offer of pardon to those who repent is bound up in the inscrutable nature of his divinity in a way which is consistent with the revelation of his divine nature to Moses in Ex. 34.

Forgiveness and the End of Exile

The prophets and the narrator of Kings all agree that exile is God's punishment on Israel for her sin. The narrative of Kings sees it as the outworking of God's punishment on Manasseh's sin to the third and fourth generation, which is precisely why Jehoiachin's reprieve offers hope of forgiveness, since he belongs to the fifth generation. The narrative of Kings can thus be read as a confession of the nation's sin, in the hope that God will forgive in accordance with Solomon's prayer.

Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah all associate the end of exile and the restoration of the nation with the forgiveness of sins. For both Isaiah and Jeremiah, the promise of post-exilic forgiveness brings with it the prospect of health (Isa. 33:24; Jer. 33:6-8) and an absence of sin (Jer. 50:20). Ezekiel holds out the hope that after the destructive judgment of exile, God will atone for the sin of the nation (16:63). Exile is thus the crucible in which Israel undergoes transgenerational punishment and in which the promises of future forgiveness are forged: exile both expresses and resolves the dialectic of God's self-revelation to Moses as the Lord who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin, and who punishes it to the third and the fourth generation.

God covenants with his people that in the future he will deal with their sin with forgiveness rather than punishing it from one generation to the next. God has the capacity to judge sin in this way, as is demonstrated by his decision to withhold forgiveness and send them into exile. Nevertheless, as the sovereign Lord who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, he is also completely free to choose to forgive iniquity, transgression and sin and to make a unilaterally binding commitment to do so in terms of a new covenant with his people.

As part of the promised restoration, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel expressly indicate that God will no longer act in accordance with the principle of transgenerational punishment: instead, each individual will die for their own sin (Jer. 31:29-30; Ezek. 18:3-4). Jeremiah follows this with the promise of a new covenant, under the terms of which the Lord will forgive and forget the sin of his people (31:34); Ezekiel develops the theme of accountability: each generation, indeed every person, will be held accountable for their own sin, and this declaration is accompanied by a summons to repentance (18:5-32).

Isaiah also has a summons to individual repentance (55:7), but whereas Isa. 40:2 LXX speaks of the end of exile in terms of the forgiveness of the nation's sin, the MT refers instead to Israel's sin having been paid for. The MT sees the end of exile in terms of the nation having suffered the penalty of intergenerational punishment in full; the LXX portrays the end of exile instead as the Lord having forgiven them their sin.

N.T. Wright makes the end of exile the hermeneutical key for interpreting the New Testament phrase, 'the forgiveness of sins', asserting that, 'Forgiveness of sins is another way of saying "return from exile".'[1]

1. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, p.268, citing on pp.269-271: Jeremiah 31:31-34; 33:4-11; Ezekiel 36:24-26, 33; 37:21-23; Isaiah 40:1-2; 43:25-44:3; excerpts from 52:1-55:12; Daniel 9:16-19.

According to Wright, the prophetic promises that the restored nation would enjoy health, prosperity and security remained unfulfilled, and consequently Israel still saw herself as being in exile and in continuing need of the forgiveness of sins.[1] Wright's claim is rightly perceived as being highly contentious:[2] after all, the towns and cities of Israel were populated with God's people and, more significantly, the temple was in place, and the temple cult, with its regular sacrificial programme for the forgiveness of sins, was fully operational. Although, as evidence that people still thought of themselves in exile, Wright can point to Daniel 9 and other rabbinic texts recalculating Jeremiah's prophecy that the exile would end after seventy years,[3] the temple cult was neither operational in the Maccabean period, nor in the aftermath of the Bar Kochba revolt when such texts were written. Nor, given Qumran's antipathy to the temple and self-imposed exile into the wilderness, can evidence from the scrolls be used to support a general perception that Israel was in exile.[4]

Wright also appeals to the writings of Baruch and Tobit,[5] but it is likely that the language of exile in these texts was applied to the huge number of Jews scattered throughout the Diaspora:[6] 2 Maccabees records that many fled the country while Jason was high priest (5:9), while Antiochus sold some 40,000 of the inhabitants of Jerusalem into slavery when he conquered the city (5:14) – such events lie behind the prayers that God would gather his scattered people in 1:27 and 2:18. Israel as a nation was not still in exile, but vast numbers of her people were.

1. N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), pp.268-272; *Jesus and the Victory of God*, pp.xvii-xviii, 126-127; *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols. (London: SPCK, 2013), vol. 1, pp.139-163.
2. Cf. F.G. Downing, *Making Sense in (and of) the First Christian Century*, pp.148-168; I.H. Jones, 'Disputed Questions in Biblical Studies: 4. Exile and Eschatology', *ExpT* 112 (2001), pp.401-405; S.M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions of Judgment and Restoration* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), pp.12-20; J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), pp.472-477; Wright has, however, found allies in C.A. Evans, 'Aspects of Exile and Restoration in the Proclamation of Jesus and the Gospels', in *Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity and Restoration* (ed. B. Chilton and C.A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp.263-297; M.E. Fuller, *The Restoration of Israel: Israel's Re-gathering and the Fate of the Nations in Early Jewish Literature and Luke-Acts* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006).
3. *Paul*, pp.142-146.
4. *Paul*, pp.146-151.
5. *Paul*, pp.151-155.
6. Tobit 1:1-3; 13:3-6; 14:3-6: Baruch, 2-4. J.M. Scott, *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp.173-218. B. Pitre argues that the hope of a return from exile applies to the ten tribes scattered among the nations following the Assyrian conquest: *Jesus, the Tribulation and the End of the Exile* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 2005).

Thus Wright's case that the nation was still in a state of exile remains unproven and, correspondingly, his interpretation of 'forgiveness of sins' as a metonymy for the end of exile is also questionable. However, the prophets did clearly speak of the nation's restoration in terms of her sins being forgiven: Isaiah says that no one in the nation will be sick, because the people will be forgiven their iniquity (33:24), and the LXX clearly saw forgiveness as the precursor to the restoration of the nation (40:2). Jeremiah declares that no sin will be found in the nation, because the Lord will pardon those he leaves as a remnant (50:20), and the Lord will forgive the sin of his people and put their iniquity out of his mind (31:34). When the nation is in the crucible of suffering God's inter-generational punishment for her sin, the Lord declares that in the future he will deal with their sin by forgiving it, rather than punishing it from one generation to the next (Jer. 31:29; Ezek. 18:3-4), but this brings with it the responsibility for individual repentance (Jer. 31:30; Ezek. 18:5-32; cf. Isa. 55:7), a repentance that will, according to Ezekiel, be divinely enabled as God gives his people a new heart (Ezek. 36:26), on which he will write his law by his Spirit (Ezek. 36:27; Jer. 31:33) in accordance with the new covenant promised in Jer. 31:31.

There is thus a degree of ambiguity as to what 'the forgiveness of sins' means for the nation of Israel after their return from exile: when John the Baptist came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, how was he understood by those who responded to his message? Were those who came to be baptised individuals who were aware of their personal accountability before God (Isa. 55:7; Jer. 31:30; Ezek. 18:1-32)? Or were they coming out of a sense that, in some way, there were dimensions of the promise of full restoration after the exile that remained unfulfilled? Was God still angry with his people? The proclamation of the forgiveness of sins by John the Baptist took place in a context of Roman domination of Israel, which could easily be taken as an indication that the sins of the nation were not completely forgiven. The opening chapter of the second section of this study seeks to examine Luke's account of Jesus' ministry of forgiveness within this specific socio-historical context.