

Diaspora Distinctives: The Jewish Diaspora Experience in the Old Testament

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This paper is an attempt to view the experience of the Jewish people in the Old Testament through a diasporic lens, and to relate those experiences to the growing phenomenon of the global diaspora today. Limited to the parameters of the Old Testament biblical history, it will seek to elicit from the biblical texts the salient characteristics of the Jewish diaspora experience and suggest how those experiences might serve as reference points for understanding the larger diaspora experience across the globe.

The Jewish experience of diaspora in the Bible solidifies around two seminal diasporic events: the experience of the Hebrew diaspora at the beginning of Israel's national history during the time of its captivity in Egypt and the Jewish diaspora in Babylon and Persia at the end of the Old Testament era.¹ The two experiences, one at each end of the Old Testament story, thus serve to "bookend" the Jewish national narrative that unfolds between them. This paper hopes that what surfaces from the discussion can be instructive in understanding the experience of the emerging modern diasporas.²

1. See Figure 1. In dealing with the Old Testament narratives that address these diasporic experiences, it will be assumed for my purposes that the Old Testament is not simply a valuable theological document but also historically reliable. This paper will proceed under the assumption that the Biblical record of Israel's experiences in both Egypt and Babylon/Persia are viable and credible, and that data emerging from the relevant texts are to be taken seriously in understanding the historical context of the diasporic experience.

2. While there is considerable debate about the precise meaning and content of the word "diaspora" as it is currently used, I will follow Robin Cohen's leading in describing *diasporas* as communities with shared identities such as "language, religion, custom or folklore," that "have settled outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories," and that maintain some sort of loyalty and emotional links with "the old country." See Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), ix.

The study of diaspora, as in the case of any historical studies, often begins by building on a foundational archetype or progenitor. This paper posits that the experience of the ancient Jewish diaspora as described in the Hebrew Bible does indeed provide a foundational model for diasporic study.³ Boyarin goes so far as to say that Jewish diaspora “may be the most important contribution that Judaism has to make to the world.”⁴ The diasporic landscape, of course, is today as wide as the horizon, the word itself being a cipher for scattered communities of many different ethnicities. However, there is no denying its Jewish origin. For these reasons the Jewish diaspora takes a seminal place in diaspora studies.⁵

The study of the Jewish diaspora usually begins with the exile of the Jewish community at the time of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in the later part of the sixth century B.C.⁶ This, however, bypasses a wealth of diasporic experience to be mined from the account of Israel’s primitive experience in Egypt at the outset of its national history.⁷ In surveying the characteristics of the Old Testament Jewish diaspora, it is helpful to describe and compare the two experiences, Egyptian and Babylonian/Persian. The initial Egyptian experience will be analyzed in terms of seven salient diasporic characteristics that emerge from the story. This will be followed by a discussion of the later diasporic experience in Babylon/Persia, while also noting two supplemental diasporic characteristics of the latter period (see Table 1).

3. This is not to say that the parameters of diaspora study are limited to a Jewish model. The study of global diasporas will obviously often transcend and supersede the Jewish diasporic tradition.

4. Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, “Generation and the Ground of Diaspora” in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, eds. Jana E Braziel and Anita Mannur (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 110.

5. See also James Clifford, “Diasporas” *Current Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (August 1994): 303; B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Spaces of Dispersal” *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (August 1994): 340; J. Boyarin, “Powers of Diaspora” (paper presented at the International Congress of the Historical Sciences, Montreal, August 27-September 3, 1995), 5.

6. Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 3.

7. In the attempt to draw up a definitive list of elements that define a diaspora, Cohen’s first limitation is that a diaspora is a community that has experienced “dispersal from an original homeland...to *two or more* [emphasis added] foreign regions.” Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 26. In this case, the Hebrew community in Egypt at the time would not constitute a true diaspora. However, given the Jewish community’s enduring cohesive uniqueness, its alienation in Egypt, and its strong sense of natal land, there is no doubt in my mind that this experience qualifies as a diaspora experience.

**Table 1 – Diasporic Characteristics of the Hebrews
in Egypt and Babylon**

DIASPORIC CHARACTERISTICS	REFLECTED IN EGYPT	REFLECTED IN BABYLON / PERSIA
1. The Foundation of an Incipient National Identity	Patriarchal Affinities	National / Historical Affinities
2. The Impetus of a Corporate Crisis	Famine	Defeat; exile
3. The Influence of Powerful Advocacy	Joseph; Moses	Daniel; Esther
4. The Legacy of Negative Historical Associations	Hyksos	<i>Realpolitik</i> ; rebellion; international intrigue
5. The Experience of Marginalization and Exploitation	Bondage	Banishment; exile
6. The Inheritance of Shared Diasporic Memory	Proactive, documentary preservation	Prophetic documentation; Feast of Purim ¹
7. The Abiding Historical and Theological Links to Natal Land	Covenant promises and hope	Covenant promises and prophetic hope
Supplemental Babylonian Diaspora Characteristics		
8. The Credibility of Healthy Diaspora/Host Interaction	N/A	Jewish Babylonians
9. The Revitalization of Natal Identity	N/A	Babylonian Jews

The Jewish Diaspora Experience in Egypt

The Foundation of an Incipient National Identity

From Israel's experience in Egypt seven elements of diasporic significance emerge that are well reflected in the experience of many diasporas today. Diasporas are by definition, groups of people who share a number of affinities with each other.⁸ Scattered people are not necessarily a diaspora unless they perceive themselves to be at least marginally

8. See footnote 2.

bound to each other by such affinities. Thus, all true diasporas have their roots in at least an incipient shared identity, whether that is linguistic, religious, or ethnic. As Cohen reminds us, “the idea of a shared origin...is a common feature of diasporas,” and “acts to ‘root’ a diasporic consciousness and give it legitimacy.”⁹ The nascent Hebrew nation at the time of the Old Testament patriarchs brought together an affinity of shared origin. For the nascent nation, the term “Father Abraham” was more than just metaphorical; it was quite literal.

Additionally, they saw themselves as distinct from the larger socio-cultural milieu of Canaan. Eschewing the pan-Canaanite pantheons of their neighbors, they uniquely worshipped Yahweh as the “most High God,” and perceived themselves as the inheritors of a divine plan that gave them a shared trajectory into the future. These affinities bound them together and kept them distinct as a people through the initial diaspora experience in Egypt – an experience that arguably lasted for over four centuries.¹⁰ It is conceivable that without such affinities, the Hebrew diaspora would simply have evaporated in Egypt in the course of time.

The longevity of any diaspora is clearly in proportion to its ability to maintain the kind of affinities that kept the Hebrew diaspora viable. Where intermarriage and cultural assimilation are major factors in the settledness of a scattered community abroad, its unique identity can easily dissipate into the majority culture and eventually disappear. Where diasporic affinities are preserved, however, the diasporic “essence,” like that of the Hebrews in ancient Egypt, is sustained and preserved.

The Impetus of a Corporate Crisis

The creation of diaspora populations have many different sources, such as “labor, trade, imperial and cultural diasporas,”¹¹ each represent-

9. Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 184.

10. There is considerable scholarly debate on the issue of the length of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt. If it is acknowledged as historical, the period is generally seen as lasting from just over two centuries. However, to see an overview of four centuries, see John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 78, 110ff. James K. Hoffmeier helpfully summarizes the debate without taking a position. See James Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 122-126. My position gives maximum weight to the Biblical data, and assumes a period of four or more centuries. For a helpful summary of the evidence of a long sojourn, see Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 75-78.

11. Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, x.

ing a different conglomerate of motivating factors producing a particular kind of diaspora. Likewise, the narrative in Genesis explains the motivation behind the Hebrew venture from Canaan to Egypt. A severe famine of seven years had ravaged the eastern Mediterranean world. In an age lacking of global emergency relief efforts, such famines could spell the end for Hebrews in Canaan for they were a small, vulnerable minority. Simply to survive, they had to move to Egypt, where the foresight of government planning had stockpiled food supplies enough to weather the storm.¹² In the process, the incipient Jewish nation in Canaan became a vulnerable Jewish diaspora in Egypt, or to put it in Cohen's typology, a "victim diaspora."¹³

The Influence of Powerful Advocacy.

Fortunately for the Hebrew community in ancient Egypt, vulnerability and weakness were balanced by the considerable intervention and support of two powerful advocates. The Biblical narrative introduces two major figures whose roles in the Jewish diasporic experience at the time were pivotal. The first was Joseph whose advocacy served the community at the time of their arrival in Egypt, and the second was Moses whose advocacy engineered their departure from the land some four centuries later.

The key to a diaspora's survival often rests in the hands of those who pursue its advocacy and such were Joseph and Moses. Ironically, a member and a blood relative of the Hebrew clan himself, Joseph emerged through a complex set of circumstances to the post of prime minister under the pharaoh of Egypt.¹⁴ The narrative undoubtedly dem-

12. Note Hoffmeier's comment that the "epigraphic and archaeological data clearly demonstrates that Egypt was frequented by the peoples of the Levant, especially as a result of climatic problems that resulted in drought . . . from the end of the Old Kingdom . . . through the Second Intermediate Period." Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 68.

13. Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 8.

14. Summarizing Hoffmeier's discussion of "Joseph in Egypt," R.E. Longacre helpfully reviews distinctively Egyptian elements in Joseph's interactions with the ruling structures and culture of the Egypt of his time. R.E. Longacre, "Joseph," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 475. To see the original chapter four, see Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 77-106. There is continuing debate about the identity of the pharaoh under whom Joseph served. In my view, the most likely candidates would be Sesotris II, Ammenemes II, and Sesotris III of ancient Egypt's twelfth dynasty. They reigned from approximately 1971 to 1843 BC. See Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 50. See also James R. Battenfield, "A Consideration of the Identity of the Pharaoh of Genesis 47," *Journal of the Evan-*

onstrates the breadth of influence he wielded across the land (see Gn 41:40ff). Therefore, when Joseph's "poor relatives" showed up in Egypt, they had the advantage of having a blood relative advocate who was serving in the host nation's second most powerful public office. Through Joseph's influence, the Hebrew clan settled in the well watered land of Goshen, a region ideally suited for their pastoral livelihoods and far enough removed from major Egyptian centers to avoid cultural frictions between the two groups.¹⁵ This purposeful segregation of the Hebrew clan from mainstream Egyptian society in the early days was important for the diaspora to maintain its socio-cultural and religious distinctives. The community in fact thrived and multiplied (Ex 1:7), which would not have been possible had it not been for Joseph.

Centuries later, as the Hebrew sojourn in Egypt drew to a closer, Moses stepped into the role of advocate. Like Joseph, Moses was himself a Hebrew by birth but raised as an adopted member of the royal family.¹⁶ Also like Joseph, he took on the role of advocate for his natal people, using his royal connections with the court to challenge the iron grip the Egyptians now held over the Hebrew diaspora. Eventually, it was Moses

gelical Theological Society 15, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 77-85. Much of the debate is contingent on the related and ongoing debate regarding the date and the ruling pharaoh of Israel's exodus from Egypt. For a current defense of a fifteenth-century exodus, see Bryant Wood, "The Rise and Fall of the 13th-Century Exodus-Conquest Theory," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 3 (September 2005): 475-89. The debate between Wood and Hoffmeier can be read in the following articles: Bryant Wood, "The Biblical Date for the Exodus is 1446 B.C.: A Response to James Hoffmeier," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 2 (June 2007): 249-58; James Hoffmeier, "What Is the Biblical Date for the Exodus? A Response to Bryant Wood," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 2 (June 2007): 225-47. My paper assumes a fifteenth-century context for the exodus.

15. The Biblical record in Genesis is at pains to underline the fact that the pastoral occupations providing the prime means of livelihood for the Hebrews, were an anathema in Egyptian society. Potential cultural frictions between the two groups were then most easily avoided by settling the Hebrews far from the centers of Egyptian society.

16. While the account of Moses' adoption and rearing in the Egyptian court is generally dismissed by minimalist scholars as the stuff of legend, the fact is that the practice of rearing foreign princes and princesses in Egyptian nurseries dedicated to purposes of training imperial civil leadership has clear attestation in the period of Egypt's New Kingdom. Thus Hoffmeier says, "The picture of Moses in Exodus 2 being taken to the court by a princess where he was reared and educated is quite consistent with the emerging information about the (*dedicated nurseries*) [italics and parenthesis added] in the New Kingdom, the only period for which there is evidence of foreigners being included in this royal institution." Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 143, 224.

who won their release, becoming in the process the “fulcrum-figure in Jewish history, the hinge around which it all turns.”¹⁷

The stories of Joseph and Moses make clear that the key to the health and viability of the Hebrew diaspora in Egypt depended on those who advocated for the community—a reality experienced by the later diaspora community at the end of the Old Testament era. As such, advocacy is a key ingredient in diaspora issues both yesterday and today, and is increasingly being recognized in governmental structures as an important dynamic in the process of diaspora engagement.¹⁸

The Legacy of Negative Historical Associations

The periods of Egypt’s Middle and New Kingdoms¹⁹ are separated by an intermediate period of about 150 years, during which an aggressive group of Semitic peoples collectively known as the Hyksos invaded and ruled much of Egypt.²⁰ The Hyksos dominance of Egypt was deeply resented, and with the eventual emergence of a powerful new native Egyptian pharaoh named Amosis in 1570 B.C., the hated interlopers were finally driven out. Subsequently, Amosis became the founder of ancient Egypt’s eighteenth dynasty, and with him the Egyptian nation experienced rebirth and renewal in the establishment of the New Kingdom.²¹

More importantly, however, the Hyksos invaders and the Hebrew diaspora, both of whom arguably made Egypt their home for a limited but overlapping period of time, shared Semitic backgrounds.²² Semitic culture was vastly different to that of Egypt. The inherent tensions between the two cultures can be clearly seen in the latter part of the Joseph narratives in Genesis, where differences of language, vocation,

17. Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1987), 27.

18. USAID, “Diaspora Engagement: Remittances & Beyond,” USAID, http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_partnerships/gda/remittances.html (accessed June 23, 2010).

19. The Middle Kingdom encompassed eleventh and twelfth dynasties and is dated roughly from 2040 to 1786 B.C. See Bright, *A History of Israel*, 51. The New Kingdom encompassed the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties and is dated from 1570 to 1223 B.C. See Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 49-50, 58-59.

20. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 59-61. Also Van Seters, *The Hyksos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 194-195. See also S. David Sperling, “Hyksos,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jewish Virtual Library, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0009_0_09361.html (accessed October 7, 2010).

21. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 54-55.

22. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 68.

and personal grooming are specifically mentioned (Gn 42:23; 43:32; 46:34).²³ As pointed out above, Joseph in his wisdom allocated Goshen land to his immigrant kinsmen because he took seriously the ethno-cultural differences.

Most likely, during the period of Hyksos dominance in Egypt, the resident Hebrew diaspora experienced relative good will under the governance of their fellow Semites. Hence, the ejection of the Hyksos and the re-emergence of native Egyptian power in the New Kingdom caused the resident Hebrew diaspora to pay a heavy price for their Semitic heritage.²⁴ In fact, the early chapters of Exodus describe a process of increasing estrangement in the relationship between the Hebrew population and their Egyptian hosts. According to Exodus 1:8, “there arose a king who knew not Joseph,” under whose rule the relationship between the Hebrews and the Egyptians began to deteriorate.²⁵ The narrative clearly highlights how Egyptians were concerned about the growth of Hebrew population—namely that they would become a dangerous “fifth column” threatening Egyptian security (Ex 1:9-10). If the narrative is read in view of an Egyptian reaction to the now ousted Hyksos, it is not difficult to imagine the ethnically related Hebrews, who remained after the Hyksos withdrawal, bearing the brunt of that reaction.²⁶

The experience of the Hebrews in Egypt is similar to many other such diasporas. The negative association of the Hebrews with the ousted Hyksos has many parallels today. What is apparent is that there is a tendency for certain kinds of diaspora populations to unintentionally carry with them negative associations and perceptions that can cause them to live under a cloud of suspicion and hostility in a host nation.

23. For a brief discussion on the interface between Egyptian and Semitic culture of the time see *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, s.v. “Egypt, Egyptians.”

24. According to Walton, it has been common to understand the relationship of the Israelites to the Hyksos in this way. See J.H. Walton, “Date of Exodus,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 263.

25. While it is impossible to make definitive statements about which precise pharaoh the narrative has in mind, I believe there are cogent arguments that it could in fact have been Amosis himself. As the one responsible for driving out the Hyksos, and as founder of a restored native Egyptian kingdom, it is not difficult to see why he may have adopted a strenuously anti-Hebrew policy. See Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 58-59.

26. See Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 122.

The Experience of Marginalization and Exploitation

The Hebrew experience in Egypt did not end with negative associations and accusation. Estrangement slowly led to outright hostility and exploitation. As a means of keeping the growing Hebrews in check, they were reduced to slave labor by the Egyptian authorities and set to work in the construction of public works projects. When this did not work, a policy of male infanticide was put into place with the obvious intention that Hebrew women would be forced to marry into the local Egyptian population and thus achieve a *de facto* assimilation (Ex 1:15-22).

While the final Egyptian measures were in the extreme by today's standards, the measures preceding this were not. Physical and economic exploitation such as the Hebrews experienced in Egypt is easily attested to in the growing world of the diaspora today. Whether they are underpaid Mexican migrant workers in the U.S., or sexually exploited Filipina house maids in the Middle East, physical abuse and political and economic exploitation have often been hallmarks of the diaspora experience. The Hebrew diaspora in Egypt may have been among the first in history to experience such, but they certainly were not the last.

The Inheritance of Shared Diasporic Memory

Cohen's introduction to the subject of global diasporas seeks to modify earlier attempts by W. Safran to delineate a set of features that give a measured definition to the term diaspora.²⁷ Among his modifications of Safran's characterization of diasporas, he includes the corporate experience of a single formative and catalytic event. Cohen writes that "dispersal from an original centre is often accompanied by the memory of a single traumatic event that provides the folk memory of the great historic injustice that binds the group together."²⁸ As such, a part of what binds a scattered group together is the corporate memory of a shared negative experience. Cohen limits this to a "single traumatic event."²⁹ The Hebrew experience in Egypt, however, suggests that the binding power of a negative experience can be much broader than a single event. While their initial transition from settled community to diaspora community was brought on by a famine, it was the lengthy experience of shared misery and exploitation over many years that became fixed in the collective memory.

27. See W. Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 83-99.

28. Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 23.

29. Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 6.

More significantly, the experiences were not simply preserved in an informal folk memory. According to Gerhard Von Rad, the collective diasporic memories were safeguarded in Israel's cultic confessions.³⁰ Israel's diasporic roots were to be rehearsed and remembered.³¹ Furthermore, the Exodus narrative itself attests to a *documentary* recording of the events, and not simply an oral tradition. The legal code which eventually emerged as Israel's "constitution," specifically enjoined the Israelites of future days so not to forget that they had once been "aliens in the land of Egypt" (Lv 19:34) and "slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt" (Dt 6:21). Once the Hebrews were permanently settled in Canaan, the Levitical code concerning the Hebrew management of debt and personal property frequently based its appeal on remembering the fact that the Hebrews had been "brought out from the land of Egypt" (cf. Lv 25:17, 23, 36, 38, 42, 55).³² The memory of having been an exploited diaspora was to be rehearsed and never forgotten. Thus, the binding impact of the experience served not only to solidify the future generations of Jews who inherited its memory, but significantly influenced the ideals behind many of Old Testament Israel's economic and social laws.

What is of particular interest in the case of the Hebrew experience in Egypt is the specifically stated purpose for what might seem to be an unnecessarily morbid rehearsal of the past. The repeated call to remember the painful diasporic past clearly had in mind a constructive and positivist future. The shared memory was *not* to serve as a nursery for fostered feelings of bitterness or retribution, but as a motivation for the ethical and just treatment of the alien communities living in land of the Hebrews (see Ex 22:21; 23:9; Dt 15:15). As Wright says,

the treatment of aliens within their own (*Hebrew*) society...was to be marked with compassion, born of the memory of Egypt where it had been denied to themselves [*italics mine*].³³

In this regard, Wolfe draws attention to Deuteronomic injunction, which in the context of its day can only be described as revolutionary:

You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. He shall live with you in your midst, in the place which

30. Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1966), 1-78.

31. See Deuteronomy 26:5-9.

32. Christopher Wright, *Living as the People of God: The Relevance of Old Testament Ethics* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), 83.

33. Wright, *Living as the People of God*, 179.

he shall choose in one of your towns where it pleases him; you shall not mistreat him (Dt 23:15-16).

“Would the authors of the Torah have promulgated such an injunction,” he argues, “unless they were themselves in actual fact descended, at least in part, from fugitive slaves? I doubt it.”³⁴ Thus the collective memory of the diaspora experience, while extremely negative in its essence, had the potential to shape positive and constructive outcomes in the future Israelite nation.

The power of a shared memory, perhaps particularly when it is a painful one, is arguably a common diasporic feature mirrored in the unfolding history of the diaspora experience. The shared inheritance of painful memories from the distant past is not easily swept under the rug. It is in fact often rehearsed, remembered, reinforced, and bequeathed to passing generations in formal and informal ways, and these memories serve as a glue that binds the community together. In addition, such memories can motivate negative or positivist responses in the subsequent history of a particular diaspora. Sadly far too often, the negative is the default reaction. The Hebrew experience however, lets us know that when a diaspora community is proactive (at least ideally), good things can come from painful memories.

The Abiding Historical and Theological Links to Natal Land

The account of the Jewish experience in Egypt suggests an additional characteristic comparable to many diasporas. Students of the diaspora phenomenon, such as Cohen and Safran, inevitably include in their lists of pan-diasporic features a “collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements,”³⁵ and “an idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation.”³⁶

All diasporas acknowledge the idea of “the old country,” the conception of a linkage, actual or perceived, to a natal land that lays some claim on the community’s loyalty and emotions. Perhaps no diaspora in history so clearly demonstrates this as the Jewish diaspora. The association of the Jewish people with the “promised land” of Canaan is not

34. Robert Wolfe, “From Habiru to Hebrews: The Roots of the Jewish Tradition,” *New English Review*, posted October 2009, http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm/frm/48464/sec_id/48464 (accessed May 27, 2010).

35. Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 26.

36. Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 26.

only the engine behind the modern Zionist movement and the creation of the state of Israel, but also it is an association that traces itself back to the very origins of the Hebrews as an identifiable community. Indeed, the relationship between the Hebrew community and the “promised land” is deeply embedded and inextricably intertwined in the foundational covenant formula that began with the patriarch Abraham and was often repeated to his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob. The linkage of covenant community to the covenant land was incorporated into and expanded on in the legal code that emerged in the time of Moses. When Moses appears at the tail end of the Egyptian diasporic period, centuries after the time of the original patriarchs, his entrance on the scene is attended with references to “the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” (Ex 3:6). This is immediately followed by a divine promise of the gift of the land of Canaan to Moses and his people (Ex 3:8); it is a clear reiteration of the original land promises given to the patriarchs. Moses, together with Aaron, relates to the gathered Israelite elders “all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses” (Ex 4:30); the divine promise of the “promised land.” It is apparent that these promises were neither new nor unknown to Moses or to the leaders of the Hebrew diasporic community in Egypt. Through the centuries of abuse and exploitation, the promise of a land, given initially to their forefathers, served to bind the community together as a diasporic group.

What was and is true of the Jewish community continues to be true for many diaspora communities around the world today. Whether they are Lebanese in Australia or Tamils in Toronto, the shared sense of autochthony and natal land continues to play an important part in shaping the self-perceptions of scattered communities abroad. The claims and counter-claims to natal land are part of the diasporic landscape, a landscape often tragically transformed into vicious battlegrounds, and it must be taken seriously in addressing the problems and challenges faced by emerging diasporas today.

One further reference must be mentioned in understanding the link between the Hebrew diaspora community and their natal land. While the community nurtured its historical links to the land as descendents of the patriarchs, it is also evident that it anticipated *restored* links to that land in the time to come. The Jewish people saw their relationship to the land as part of a trajectory that would eventually take them into the future. From their perspective, their link to the land was not just a passing chapter in the larger unfolding human story; rather, it was a centerpiece in Yahweh’s unfolding *universal* story. Their bond to the land was not only built on historical links to the patriarchs, but also on a theological view of future promises. The Hebrew diaspora’s return to Canaan

was endowed with a sense of mission “from on high.” The Abrahamic covenant underscored their existence as a community in the “promised land,” through which “all families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gn 12:3). While this global focus was often forgotten, the hope and anticipation engendered by being a part of cosmic drama must certainly have had a powerful effect on a struggling diaspora. Though they were mere slaves in the eyes of Egyptians, but to those with the eyes of faith, they were nothing less than God’s “chosen people.”

The Hebrew diaspora held on to the promises God had given to their fathers through dark periods in their history. Also, their corporate faith in the future promised by God sustained them to survive as a community even today. As such, hope for the future will always function as a vital ingredient in the vibrancy of a diasporic community.

The Jewish Diaspora Experience in Babylon and Persia

As Hebrews settled in Canaan after the exodus from Egypt, they established a nation with a monarchy. With the advent of Solomon’s son Rehoboam, however, the kingdom was split into two. The northern kingdom had ten tribes. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin composed of the southern kingdom, centered around the Davidic capital of Jerusalem. In a world shaped by imperialistic appetites, the viability of the two small Jewish kingdoms was inevitably threatened and brought to the brink of extinction. In 722 BC, the northern kingdom was decimated by an Assyrian juggernaut, and its population forcibly marched off to the hinterlands of the Assyrian Empire.³⁷ Some 130 years later in 586 BC, Chaldeans destroyed the temple and Jerusalem city in the kingdom of Judah and carried its people as captives to Babylon.³⁸

The exiled populations of the northern kingdom were largely assimilated to their (enforced) host cultures, and eventually lost their identity as a unique people.³⁹ However, the trajectory of the Jewish popula-

37. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 275. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 398.

38. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 453.

39. See Bright, *A History of Israel*, 275. See also R.L. Hubbard Jr., “History of the People of Israel,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1982), 2: 917. It is helpful to note that some people of the Israelite population of the northern kingdom were resettled by the Assyrians in the areas of Babylon and Mesopotamia where they likely retained much of their Israelite identity. They served in effect as precursors to the Jewish exiles from the southern kingdom who were later brought to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. See Wordpress, “The Babylonian Exile-1/Beginnings,” Theophyle’s Biblical - ANE Blog, entry posted on September 25, 2009, <http://theophyle.com>.

tion of the kingdom of Judah was significantly different than that of its northern neighbor. Not only was its Jewish identity preserved, but it also flourished and spread. Judah as a kingdom ceased to exist with the destruction of the Jerusalem in 586 BC and the large scale of deportation of Jews to Babylon, but Jewish life and identity continued in the diaspora community transplanted in the heart of the Babylonian Empire.⁴⁰ In Babylon, the Judean diaspora grew and flourished in numbers and influence across the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean world. By the time of Christ, seven percent of the Roman dominated Mediterranean world was said to have been Jewish.⁴¹ In fact, the total Jewish population at this time is estimated to have been “around four and one-half million at the beginning of the Christian era – one million each in Syria, Egypt, and Palestine, plus one and a half million in Asia Minor, Europe, and Africa.”⁴²

Comparisons to the Egyptian Hebrew Diaspora

An initial perusal of the Jewish diaspora in Babylon immediately yields a number of interesting comparisons to the earlier Hebrew diaspora in Egypt. It would not be difficult to find at least a measure of each of the seven characteristics of the Egyptian period duplicated in the later Babylonian experience. The importance of an incipient national identity mentioned earlier, the impetus of a corporate crisis, or the experience of marginalization and exploitation under the Egyptians, can each find similar echoes in the experience of the exiled Jewish community as it scabbled to set up a new life in the dominating social milieu of Babylon.

Perhaps the clearest parallel between the two diaspora experiences is in the matter of advocacy. The narratives of Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah, like those of Joseph and Moses, underline the importance, if not life-saving, of what advocates can have on vulnerable diaspora communities. Without them, a diaspora community often remains a people without a voice; with them, it has a powerful platform from which to air its concerns and problems. Advocacy, therefore, is a vital ingredient in the health and development of a diaspora.

wordpress.com/2009/09/25/the-babylonian-exile-1-beginnings/ (accessed October 10, 2010).

40. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 453.

41. Roger Hedlund, *God and the Nations* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), 155.

42. Hedlund, *God and the Nations*, 155.

Diaspora Distinctives of the Babylonian / Persian Exile

Two diasporic characteristics emerge uniquely from the period of Israel's Babylonian exile.⁴³ As with the Egyptian captivity, these emerge from the narratives of their time and find ready parallels in many subsequent diaspora experiences in history.

The Credibility of Healthy Diaspora / Host Interaction

The experience of the exiled Jewish community in Babylon can serve as a helpful model to construct a positive, proactive integration of diasporas into their host cultures. The Jewish diaspora's response to Babylonian rule was not one of disengagement and detachment. To the contrary, one finds in both the Biblical and secular records, much evidence that the Jewish exiles quickly became part of the fabric of the empire.⁴⁴ This was in fact, the implicit instruction of the prophet Jeremiah. He had warned of Jerusalem's impending destruction for years, and then had been an eyewitness to it. Nevertheless, once the inevitable took place, he urged a spirit of accommodation. To the exiles who were embittered by the experience or to the ones who envisioned a quick return home, Jeremiah gave them clear instructions to settle, raise families, and seek the welfare of their host nation (Jer 29:4-7). In other words, a constructive long term engagement with the host culture was to be the pattern. Even in as a diaspora community, they were to be a blessing to the nations.

The call to be a blessing to other nations was already set in place with Daniel and his associates as they served in the Babylonian administration. Daniel's example was followed by the Jewish exiles. The Biblical evidence, corroborated by occasional Babylonian records, testifies to a community that by and large adjusted remarkably well.⁴⁵ Cuneiform records of the time reveal Jewish names on Babylonian military rolls and business transactions.⁴⁶ The artisans and craftsmen brought over from Jerusalem were well employed in Babylon's many building projects.⁴⁷ They so flourished in the new land that the majority elected to stay in

43. See Figure 1.

44. Richard de Ridder, *Disciplining the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 66.

45. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 471.

46. Wolfe cites the records of one Jewish commercial firm, "Murashu & Sons Bank," having dealings with Persians, Medes, Arameans and others in international trade. See de Ridder, *Disciplining the Nations*, 66; Giuseppe Ricciotti, *History of Israel* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1958), 2: 63.

47. Ely Emanuel Pilchik, *Judaism Outside the Holy Land: The Early Period* (New York: Block Publishing, 1964), 106.

Babylonia even when they were given the opportunity to return to the natal land under Ezra's leadership.⁴⁸ It would appear that the exiled Jewish community, while initially "weeping by the rivers of Babylon" (Ps 137:1), were in fact "reaping by the rivers of Babylon" in relatively short order.

Therefore, in many areas of public life the Jewish diasporic community, while retaining its Jewish identity, became Jewish Babylonians and contributed positively to the life and *shalom* of the city as Jeremiah had challenged them to do. By the time of Esther, Jewish communities had spread to every province of the Persian Empire,⁴⁹ underlining the increasingly pervasive presence of a Jewish diasporic community that had learned to prosper in alien environments.

Perhaps one of the most common stereotypes of diaspora communities is that they tend to be insular, detached, and defensive in their relationships to the host culture. However, the Jewish experiences in Babylon and Persian empires demonstrate that a diaspora community can work proactively within a host culture by engaging in it in positive ways without compromising its essential identity. Surely, the unfolding history of the Jewish diaspora, fraught with the horrors of the ghetto and the holocaust, is a tribute to the ability of a diasporic community to contribute to and deeply enrich the life of a host culture.

The Revitalization of Natal Identity

As it was pointed out, Jewish *Babylonians* never lost their identity as Babylonian *Jews* even as they proactively engaged with the host culture. The reason has much to do with their appreciation of Jewish identity, faith, and heritage. Over the next few centuries, Babylon in fact became a major center of Jewish revitalization. It is estimated that by the time of Christ, Babylon alone had a Jewish population numbering a million or more.⁵⁰ This is a remarkable achievement in light of the fact that the initial influx of Jews into Babylon at the time of the exile likely numbered no more than 36,000 to 48,000 men, women, and children.⁵¹ While

48. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 473.

49. See Esther 3:8 and 8:9.

50. S. W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 1: 132; S. Grayzel, *A History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), 138; F. A. Norwood, *Strangers and Exiles: A History of Religious Refugees* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1969), 141.

51. The Jewish Encyclopedia, "The Babylonian Captivity," Bible History Online, http://www.bible-history.com/map_babylonian_captivity/map_of_the_deportation_of_judah_jewish_encyclopedia.html (accessed June 4, 2010).

the formal “exile” was short in that it lasted some seventy years, as Paul Johnson puts it, “its creative force was overwhelming.”⁵² Precisely during this time, the community established the synagogues,⁵³ and Jewish scholars and scribes developed a Babylonian Talmud and a Masoretic school that produced a network of invaluable biblical texts and manuscripts.⁵⁴ In short, Babylonian centers of Judaism rivaled all others for eras to come. As de Ridder says, “Israel threw off the vestment of her statehood together with her kingdom with remarkable ease and without apparent internal crisis.”⁵⁵ Speaking of the vibrancy of later expressions of diasporic Judaism, Davies says, “It was its ability to detach loyalty from ‘place’, while nonetheless retaining ‘place’ in its memory, that enabled Pharisaism to transcend the loss of its land.”⁵⁶

The Jewish community displayed a remarkable propensity to adapt comfortably to its new surroundings. By Esther’s time, Jewish communities were scattered throughout the Persian Empire, but they still maintained a distinct and discernible identity that they were recognized in any of the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire (Est 3:8-13). This dissociation of the Jewish diaspora from physical political hegemony over a natal place is a “lesson” to the diaspora communities of today. Namely, “peoples and land are not naturally and organically connected,” and that “it is possible for a people to maintain its distinctive culture, its difference, without controlling land.”⁵⁷ At the very least, the case shows that the “divorce” between the Jewish diaspora and its natal land, whether temporary or permanent, did not sound the diaspora’s death knell, but one that played a significant role in revitalizing its natal identity. However, the question is “How did the Jewish diaspora in the environs of Babylon and beyond not only survive but thrive?” Five factors arise from the Biblical record that help to explain how this happened:

1. The continuity of Jewish leadership structures.
2. The influence of Jewish prophets.
3. The example of Jewish statesmen and women.

52. Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, 83.

53. De Ridder, *Disciplining the Nations*, 77-79. See also *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Synagogue.”

54. Pilchik, *Judaism Outside the Holy Land*, 103ff; see also Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 481-482.

55. De Ridder, *Disciplining the Nations*, 76.

56. William D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 103.

57. Boyarin, “Generation and the Ground of Diaspora,” 110.

4. The power of a renewed faith.
5. The renewal of ties to the natal land.

The Continuity of Jewish Leadership Structures

The fall of Jerusalem was a massive blow to Jewish national aspirations. Jewish identity had for many years coalesced around Jerusalem, the sacred capital of God's chosen people, and its glorious temple as the dwelling place of Yahweh. The inviolability of both was accepted almost as an article of faith.⁵⁸ Yahweh's unconditional promises of a never-ending Davidic dynasty and his choice of Zion as its earthly loci were the dogmas on which state and cult were founded.⁵⁹ Nebuchadnezzar's battering rams however made short work of such theology. With Jerusalem's destruction, inviolability was shown to be a house of cards as the central structures of Jewish identity were reduced to rubble.

The smoking rubble of Jerusalem, however, did not necessarily lead to an amorphous Jewish rabble in Babylon. To the contrary, right from the start, there was a measure of continuity in the leadership and administrative structures that the Babylonians allowed the Jewish community to retain. As long as the internal organization of the diaspora community was strong enough to resist the influences of an alien environment, Jewish identity could be maintained.⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that Jeremiah's letter to the community exiled in Babylon is addressed to "the elders of the exile, the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon" (Jer 29:1). Clues such as these suggest that many of the leadership structures that had organized and administered life in Jerusalem, were still functioning to some degree among the diaspora community in Babylon.

Furthermore, a semblance of the Jewish monarchy was to some degree retained. While Jehoiachin, the next to last king of independent Judah, was marched off to Babylon together with his family in the second deportation, the Babylonian king eventually released him and afforded him royal recognition (2 Kgs 25:27-30). In Babylonian tablets, he is referred to as "King of Judah," and the Jewish community in Babylon continued to regard him as the rightful Judean king instead of his replacement, Zedekiah, who ruled during Jerusalem's final years.⁶¹ The

58. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism*, 56.

59. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 347.

60. De Ridder, *Disciplining the Nations*, 76.

61. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 452; see also William Albright, "King Jehoiachin in Exile," in *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, eds. David Noel Freedman and G. Ernest Wright (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961), 1: 106-107.

implication is that the institution of the Judean monarchy found some sort of expression among the diaspora community in Babylon. Thus, one of the reasons for the relative health and stability of the Jewish diaspora can be traced to the existence, operation, and continuity of familiar Jewish leadership that provided a semblance of structure and stability for a community seeking to ground itself in a strange land.

The Influence of Jewish Prophets

The viability of the Jewish diaspora depended most in the Hebrew prophetic institution. The tone of the prophetic message before the final fall of Jerusalem was generally very critical because the nation had abandoned genuine adherence to the law of Moses. However, once the destruction of Jerusalem was complete and the bulk of the Jewish population was exiled in a strange land, the tone of the prophetic message often changed dramatically. The latter parts of both Isaiah's and Jeremiah's prophecies drip with hope for the future of God's chosen people. While these men were not physically on the scene in Babylon, their weighty words reminded the diaspora of their shared historical roots and of their future calling and purpose as God's covenant people. As Bright writes, "their affirmation . . . of the ultimate triumph of Yahweh's redemptive purpose provided men with a hope to which they could cling."⁶² In addition, prophets such as Ezekiel and Daniel, who lived and ministered among the diaspora themselves, led the exiled people to place their hope in what God has planned for them.

The Example of Jewish Statesmen and Women

If the message of Jewish prophets inspired hope, the example of courageous Jewish statesmen and women serving in the public realm inspired admiration. The iconic stories that emerge—Daniel and the lions' den; Shadrach, Meshech, Abednego in the fiery furnace; and Queen Esther risking her life before the Persian king for the sake of her people—contributed to constructing ethnic and national pride. Such people were living examples of loyal citizens of the empire who carried weight in high places, who in the same breath were unapologetically Jewish. As such stories are retold to generations, the identity of the scattered people is strengthened thereby invigorating the community life.

62. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 349.

The Power of Renewed Faith

Another significant reason for the growth of the Jewish diaspora in the beginning years of the exile had to do with the renewal of its inherited faith in the law of Moses. In Israel's national history, fidelity to the covenant with Yahweh was often seriously compromised. Consequently, Yahweh forsook Jerusalem and his sacred dwelling place in the temple and allowed his covenant people to be driven from the land by the invading Babylonians.

The hiatus in Babylon, however, was never meant to be final, for its purpose was to be disciplinary and redemptive. God's ultimate goal was to turn the people's hearts back to his presence. Therefore, during the initial years of diasporic life, Jewish diaspora rediscovered faith in God and in his law, and the Jews at this time became what one might call the first truly monotheistic people. They also made missionary efforts to spread their faith throughout the Near East and the Mediterranean world. De Ridder and Hedlund document the passion and energy of Jewish mission during the period between the Old and the New Testaments and ascribe much of the astounding multiplication of Jewish populations at the time to this missionary activity.⁶³ Hedlund writes that "It is utterly impossible to explain the large total of Jews in the Diaspora by the mere fact of the fertility of Jewish families. We must assume . . . that a very large number of pagan . . . trooped over to the religion of Yahweh."⁶⁴

The Renewal and Revitalization of Ties to the Natal Land

In the final years of the exile, the vast majority of the Jewish world was living outside the bounds of the "promised land." Diaspora was now in fact the predominate expression of Jewish life. Interestingly, however, the last chapter of the Old Testament narrative is not a diaspora story. Though it is a story of a minority group, its locus is once again the promised land.

In the first year of his reign in Babylon (538 B.C.), Cyrus issued a decree mandating the re-establishment of the Jewish community and religion in Palestine.⁶⁵ Over the next one hundred years, the Biblical narrative indicates that several waves of Jewish exiles took advantage of

63. For an overview of this point, see Hedlund's book, *God and the Nations*, and de Ridder's *Discipling the Nations*.

64. Hedlund, *God and the Nations*, 155.

65. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 361; *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Cyrus."

this opportunity to return to the land of their fathers.⁶⁶ Under the leadership of men such as Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, the returnees were able to restore a semblance of Jewish life and religious practice in Jerusalem and its environs. The reseeding of the natal land eventually produced the million-strong Jewish community that populated Palestine by the time of Christ.

Two observations arise in regard to the relationship of the “return movement” and the diaspora that remained at large in the Persian Empire. First, only a very small percentage of the Jewish diaspora actually returned to their native land because of the reasons specified above.⁶⁷

Secondly, the small percentage of returnees, however, does not indicate that there was a radical “disconnect” between the diaspora and its natal land. Whether one chose to return or stay, no Jew could ever deny his or her natal links to the land. “By the rivers of Babylon,” the captive exiles sang, “there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion” (Ps 137:1). “If I forget you, O Jerusalem,” they continued, “may my right hand forget her skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy” (Ps 137:5-6).

For this reason, Daniel, who most likely died without ever setting eyes again on the Jerusalem of his youth, retained his ties to the natal land by praying three times a day in a position that faced Jerusalem (Dn 6:4-10). Clearly, neither the threat of death nor long years in exile had dimmed his attachment to Jerusalem as his true spiritual home. Sometime later, while noting that the seventy year exile prophesied by Jeremiah is close to completion (Dn 9:2), Daniel was stirred into a majestic prayer of confession on behalf of his people. In it, he makes reference to “the land,” “Jerusalem,” “the inhabitants of Jerusalem,” “your holy mountain,” “your city Jerusalem,” “your desolate sanctuary,” and “the holy mountain of God” ten times in eighteen verses (Dn 9:3-20). Even though exiled in Babylon, the natal land and its spiritual associations clearly remained the focus of his heart. Daniel’s attitude to his natal land seems to be reflective of the attitude of the rest of the diaspora to their homeland. This is reflected in the event of Zerubbabel and Sheshbazaar leading over 50,000 exiles back to Palestine and rebuilding their lives on the ruins of Jerusalem. The vast majority of these returnees were Jewish exiles who had been born and raised in the diaspora and had likely never set eyes on the land of their forefathers.

66. The Biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah give passing descriptions of these returns. The post-exilic prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi give additional background regarding the struggles the returnees faced upon return.

67. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 493.

Moreover, Ezra makes clear that the remaining diaspora community provided financial support for the first wave of returnees under Zerubbabel (Ezr 1:6). In 458 B.C., some eighty years after the first return, Ezra led a second return to Palestine.⁶⁸ Though much smaller in size, it is indicative of a continued interest among the Jewish diaspora in matters relating to Palestine. In 445 B.C., Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. The impetus that pushed him sprang from the same deep sense of identification with natal land that had so moved Daniel, Ezra, and others (see Neh 1:1-4).

The connection between the Jewish diaspora and its natal land uncover two dynamics that are noteworthy. First, the Jewish diaspora had a deep attachment to its natal land, a value which held this scattered community together. This is underlined by the distinction many diaspora Jews made between “exile” and simple “dispersion.” In the mind of the Jewish diaspora, these were not synonymous terms. The Jews were not simply a people in dispersion; they were a people in exile. As Davies says,

That Jews outside Palestine conceived of their existence not simply as a dispersion meant that, wherever they were, they were still bound symbolically, theologically as well as historically, to their home base, to Eretz Israel: they were not simply scattered. The Diaspora maintained the notion of its existence as (*an*) exile [*italics mine*].⁶⁹

Thus, as a people who perceived themselves to be a nation in “exile,” the land remained a viable, emotive, and living issue. There was a fundamental orientation to the natal land that bound the dispersed Israel together. Shared linkage to a natal land is an affinity that continues to bind diasporas of all shapes and sizes together today. And the emotions and feelings that are generated in the hearts of scattered people who dream of ancient homelands find their diasporic ancestors in the scattered Jewish communities of the Bible.

Secondly, the renewal and revitalization of Jewish life “in” the land came from the Jewish diaspora “outside” the land. The accounts in Ezra, Nehemiah, and the post-exilic prophets demonstrate that it is the replanted Jewish community that struggled to maintain its covenant identity as the people of God. It was not “insiders,” but “outsiders,” like Ezra and Nehemiah, who brought renewal and recommitment to those who had resettled in the promised land. Therefore, as demonstrated by the Jewish diaspora communities in Old Testament history, perhaps—in this age of increasing change and globalization—every nation wedded

68. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 502.

69. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism*, 80.

to its soil can also gain fresh perspectives from a diaspora in order to enhance life.⁷⁰

Conclusion

This paper has sought to understand the Jewish experience in the Old Testament through a diasporic lens. From the accounts of the Jewish diasporic experience in Egypt and Babylon/Persia, nine salient characteristics have emerged that lent the diasporic community its cohesiveness and durability. While these distinctives were experienced in a unique way by the ancient Jews, this paper has presented that they are applicable to the broader community of diasporas throughout the world and history. The affinities that blend together to give a diaspora community its identity are perhaps reflected in “trans-diasporic” affinities that give all diasporas a shared unity of identity and experience. Can yesterday’s diasporas bequeath an inheritance of wisdom and hope to the emerging diasporas of today? One can only hope the answer will be “yes.”

70. Illustrative of this point, Robin Cohen says, “Although born in China, Sun Yixian (Sun Yat-sen) developed his political consciousness in Hong Kong and in the Chinese community in Hawaii. His Society for the Revival of China was a crucial instrument in the promotion of a modern Chinese nationalism.” Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 185.