

NEW SCHOLAR

EXILE AND DEPORTATION AS DIVINE DISPLACEMENT

A Search for the Literary and Theological Functions of the Motif of the Divine Displacement of Israel and Judah in Genesis to Kings

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Introduction

The main quest that propels this study is to find out the literary and theological function of the motif of attributing divine agency to the forced migration of the people of Israel/Judah in Genesis to Kings. This search is schematised into three constituting questions: i) Within the Primary History, what kind of literary expressions and metaphoric language is used for describing the experiences of forced migration as divine action? ii) How do these literary expressions and metaphoric language play out in the composition of Genesis to Kings in which Deuteronomy and Kings are specially relevant? iii) What theological objective is obtained by the incorporation of this interlinking literary motif?

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Consequently, the dissertation deals with these questions in the following manner: The introductory part presents the research question and sets the context by means of a tripartite status quaestionis: a) a brief overview of the research on the historiography in Genesis to Kings, b) situating the Bible's references to forced migration within the historical phenomena of deportations as imperial practice, c) the history of the theological interpretations of forced migration, in which significant contributions by Odil Hannes Steck, Peter Ackroyd, Michael Knibb, Ralph Klein, Robert Carroll, Norbert Lohfink, Konrad Schmid, Jörn Kiefer, Michael Fuller, John Ahn, Martien Halvorson-Taylor, Jill Middlemas, Dominik Markl, etc. are discussed. In the first chapter of the dissertation, relevant texts in Leviticus and Deuteronomy are examined closely to see the specific verbal phrases and constructions used to incorporate this motif in them. The second chapter then applies the same analysis to the relevant texts in Kings. The final chapter deals with the two remaining questions regarding the literary linking and the theological function.

Relevance of the Study

A brief survey of relevant authors illustrated in the introductory sections of the dissertation, though not exhaustive, shows that substantial work has been done in the field of the theology of deportation and displacement in the Hebrew Bible. However, a focused study of the texts in Genesis to Kings that attribute divine agency to the forced migration of the people of Israel and Judah is still lacking. The analysis of these texts with a view of understanding the phrases and metaphors used to express the motif of attributing divine agency to forced migration can add newer nuances to the extensive research done in the past. It can corroborate the interconnectedness of the mega-narrative that extends from Genesis to Kings and thereby shed light on the profound theological nuances that this grand narrative aims to communicate.

Methodology and Outline

The first two chapters of the thesis are dedicated to a close reading of the texts identified within Genesis for Kings. After establishing each text using textual critical considerations where necessary, the analysis situates every occurrence of the motif within its narrative and rhetorical contexts. Analysis of the historical context and extra-biblical references will be employed where specifically relevant. This is followed by the analysis of each significant phrase within the relevant verse, and in doing so, an attempt is made to bring out and to

recognise the motif of attributing divine agency to the forced displacement of the people.

The first part of the third chapter will analyse how the motif of divine agency in forced migration interconnects the selected texts. For the evaluation of the motif of attributing divine agency to the forced migration of Israel/Judah as a link between Deuteronomy and Kings, the five criteria of intertextual analysis advocated by Manfred Pfister are used: selectivity, structurality, referentiality, dialogicity, and communicativity. After having recognised the literary motif of attributing divine agency to the forced migration of Israel/Judah in the said texts, and after having established the motif as a literary link, the results are synthesised to consider the literary and theological function of this textual phenomenon. The final parts of the third chapter examine the pragmatic functions of this interlinking motif, aiming to highlight its communicative force for historiography and theology, with a summary of the results presented in the conclusion.

Announcements of Israel's Displacement in the Pentateuch

The literary expressions that involve the motif in Leviticus and Deuteronomy employ metaphoric verbs mainly from the field of agriculture and animal husbandry to express YHWH's action of displacing: זרה "to scatter" (Lev 26,33), פוץ "to scatter" (Deut 4,27; 28,64; 30,3), נהג "to lead" (Deut 28,37), שלך "to throw" (Deut 29,27) and נדח "to drive away" (Deut 30,1). Two verbs are employed to denote the 'uprooting' action of YHWH in Deuteronomy: נתש (Deut 29,27) and נסה (Deut 28,63). A similar terminology appears in Kings, which includes נתש "to uproot" and זרה "to scatter" (1 Kgs 14,15) and שלך "to throw" (2 Kgs 17,20; 24,20).

The choice of literary expressions in pentateuchal texts to describe divine displacement shows the metaphorisation of forced migration and its interpretation with a view of future restoration. In Lev 26, the metaphor of "scattering" (זרה; v.33) and the MT's preference of the phrase "I took them" (והבאתי אתם; v.41) instead of the LXX *Vorlage*'s "I destroyed them" (והאבדתי אתם) show the hesitation to perceive the divine act as destructive. The motif of divine displacement in Lev 26 is oriented towards the future restoration, as it concludes in the promise: "I will remember the covenant" (וזכרתי את-בריתי; v.42).

The precise affirmation of Deut 4,27 in active voice, "YHWH will scatter you among the nations" (והפיץ יהוה אתכם בעמים), can be contrasted, on the one hand, with the phrase "you will soon utterly

perish" (אבד תאבדון), and, especially, with the passive voice (*niphal*) phrase "you will be utterly destroyed" (השמד תשמדון) in v. 26, and, on the other hand, with the three verbs of negation in v.31 that explain the merciful character of the same YHWH: "he will not abandon you" (לא ירפך), "he will not destroy you" (לא ישהיתך), "he will not forget the covenant" (לא ישכח את־ברית). This change of tone from the one of warning and threat in v.26 to the one of invitation to conversion by recognising the "merciful YHWH" (כי אל רחום יהוה) in v.31 is facilitated by attributing to divine agency the act of dispersing the people and scattering them among the peoples, thereby avoiding the complete annihilation of the people and at the same time keeping open the possibility of a return as mentioned in v.30: "you shall return to YHWH your God" (ושבת עדי־יהוה אלהיך).

The motif expressed as YHWH 'scattering' (פוצ) the people among the nations (והפיצך יהוה בכל־העמים/בגוים) is repeated three times in the framing chapters of Deuteronomy (4,27; 28,64; 30,3), oriented towards the re-gathering (קבץ) promised in Deut 30,3, that speaks of the possibility of restoration and return to the land. The occurrences of this motif in Deut 29–30 (29,27; 30,1.3) together represent the metaphorical understanding of the divine displacement as "uprooting" (נתש), "throwing away" (שלך), and "scattering" (פוצ), with a future prospect of "re-gathering" (קבץ). The divine act of wrath is being interpreted using this series of agricultural metaphors, whereby the unpalatable historical reality of being forcefully displaced becomes a memory of divinely willed punishment and purification.

YHWH's Displacement of Israel and Judah in Kings

Two occurrences of the motif in Kings are prophetic utterances. After the consecration of the Temple, YHWH warns Solomon of cutting (כרת) Israel off from the land and of casting out (שלוח) the house consecrated in His Name (1 Kgs 9,7). The prophecy of Ahijah in the context of Jeroboam's rebellion directly announces that YHWH will "uproot Israel" (ונתש את־ישראל) out of the good land and "scatter them beyond the Euphrates" (וזרם מעבר לנהר) (1 Kgs 14,15). In these texts, the divine punitive action is described as casting out (שלוח/שלך), and scattering (זרה), where, instead of פוצ used in Deuteronomy, זרה from a similar semantic field is used for the divine displacement. Along with the uprooting action described by נתש, the historical reality of forced migration is presented as a divine act of uprooting and scattering.

The incidences of the motif in 2 Kgs 17 (vv.18.20.23) speak of the deportation of the northern tribes to Assyria as a divine act of punishment. YHWH “removed them from his presence” ויסרם מעל פניו (v.18), “threw them away from his presence” השליכם מפניו (v.20), and “removed Israel from his presence” הסיר יהוה את־ישראל מעל פניו (v.23a). Similarly, the occurrences of divine displacement in the final part of the historiography (2 Kgs 23,27; 24,3.20) also speak of YHWH’s act of ‘removing’ (סור) and ‘casting out’ (שליך) the people. For the scribes composing the historiography in Kings, the divine act was experienced by the people as a punitive act of divine fury: they were uprooted and thrown out like a plant from its soil. The trauma of this experience and the exigence to digest it theologically is indicated in the recurring phrase “from his presence” (מעל פניו). It was not just from the land, but from the very presence of YHWH that they were being expelled.

The Attribution of Divine Agency to the Forced Migration as a Literary Link between Deuteronomy and Kings

Within the Primary History, the motif of divine displacement is unique to Leviticus 26, the framing chapters of Deuteronomy, and the historiography in Kings, and the specific phrases used to describe this motif contain metaphoric language intended to interpret and to theologise history. On a literary level, the heightened presence of this motif in specific parts of Deuteronomy and in the concluding events of the history of Israel and Judah in the Book of Kings functions as an interlinking reference. While, on the one hand, in the final form of the larger narrative of Genesis to Kings, the prophetic announcements in Deuteronomy are shown to have been fulfilled in the historic tragedy narrated in Kings, on the other hand, the inconclusive finale of Kings, while characterising the devastation of forced migration as divine punishment, refers back to Deuteronomy’s prophecies for confirmation and future hope of restoration.

The following common elements in these occurrences help establish the interlinking function of the motif: i) YHWH as the explicit or at least implicit subject of the act of expulsion, ii) the people of Israel/Judah as the object, iii) the presence of a verb/verbal-phrase denoting expulsion/forced-displacement as a historical event. Additionally, most of the references also comprise phrases to denote the place from where the people are sent out and/or phrases to show the place/people to which they are expelled. Within the texts that carry this motif, there are many other recurring phrases that show the

connectedness of these texts. For example, i) “angering YHWH by doing evil” (כעס + בעיני + רע + עשה; Deut 4,25; 2 Kgs 17,17); ii) “selling oneself” (מכר in hithpael; Deut 28,68; 2 Kgs 17,17); iii) “made of hands of man, wood and stone” (מעשה ידי אדם עץ ואבן; Deut 4,28; 2 Kgs 19,18); iv) “becoming an object of horror” (היה + ל + שמה; Deut 28,37; 2 Kgs 22,19); v) “a proverb and a cautionary tale” (ולשנינה למשל; Deut 28,37; 1 Kgs 9,7); vi) the Remnant-Phrases like נשאתם מתי מספר (Deut 4,27; 28,62; 2 Kgs 17,18; 19,30; 24,14); vii) phrases indicating “YHWH’s covenant with the ancestors” (Deut 29,24; 2 Kgs 13,23).

An intense example of intertextual connection among these references is the one between “He (YHWH) threw them into another land” (וישלכם אל-ארץ אחרת) in Deut 29,27 on the one hand and “until he threw them away from his presence” (עד אשר השליכם מפניו) in 2 Kgs 17,20, and “up to his throwing them out from his presence” (עדיהשלכו) in 2 Kgs 24,20 on the other hand, where the divine act of expulsion is described using the verb “to throw” (שליך). Applying the criteria of intertextual analysis suggested by Pfister (selectivity, referentiality, communicativity, structurality, and dialogicity), the literary expression of YHWH “throwing” the people out is pinpointed as an intertextual link. Similarly, the divine displacement is described as “uprooting” in Deut 29,27 and 1 Kgs 14,15 using נתש. There are also other verbs which, though not repeated in both books as such, have close semantic counterparts in the texts attributing divine agency: פוץ “scatter”, used three times in Deuteronomy’s texts carrying this motif (4,27; 28,64; 30,3), is semantically similar to זרה “scatter” in Lev 26,33 and 1 Kings 14,15. Similarly, נסה “pluck off” (Deut 28,63) is comparable with נתש “uproot” (1 Kgs 14,15). The similarity between שלח “send away” (1 Kgs 9,7) and שליך “throw away” (Deut 29,27) is not merely in semantics but also in phonology. Phonological resemblance can be noted also between the verbs נסה “pluck off” and נדה “drive away”. The phrases formed using these verbs, along with the same grammatical subject (יהוה) and object (people), form a tight knitted intertextual link between pentateuchal prophecy and deuteronomistic historiography, which helps to provide interconnectedness and increased coherence to the larger narrative in the Primary History.

Theological Objective of the Interlinking Motif

Having pointed out the literary function of this motif as that of linking the negative finale of Kings to the warning prophecies in the Pentateuch and of providing some cohesiveness to the extended storyline presented in the Primary History, it can be asked further,

what ulterior theological purpose this literary linking obtained. As the Exodus narrative of divine liberation becomes a foundational paradigm for the historiography of Israel, the experience of forced migration as divine scattering of the people becomes a paradigmatic motif with which history was theologised. The intertextually connected motif of divine displacement advances the theology of the Hebrew Bible, portraying YHWH as a universal and all-powerful God and redefining the people of Israel/Judah as a people belonging to YHWH even after being punished and thrown out. The history of destruction and forceful displacement becomes not just a reminder to be faithful and a warning of consequences, but also a promise of persisting divine faithfulness that transcends human failure: this latter then becomes the basis for the hope of return to the Promised Land at the end of the migratory existence in Babylon in the historical setting of the 6th century BCE and the possibility of experiencing restoration to the divine allegiance at any point in history wherever the text is received.

Thus, the pragmatic objective of this interlinking motif is to transform the self-understanding of the people in relation to YHWH. This application is made possible by the following characteristics that the motif contains: i) the shift from 'provocation-anger-annihilation' formula that occurs elsewhere in the narrative (with verbs of destruction like **שָׁמַד** and **אַבַּד**) to 'provocation-anger-exile' formula characterising the divine act as restrained chastisement; ii) The use of agricultural metaphors like 'uprooting' (**נָתַשׁ/נָסַח**) and 'throwing away' (**שָׁלַךְ**) to understand the divine punishment in terms of a purification of the land; iii) the metaphor of 'scattering' (**זָרָה/פָּרֵץ**) that renders the self-understanding of the displaced people as similar to the seeds scattered in the fields to sprout and to grow, and to be transplanted or re-gathered later (explicated by the more obvious reference to the future possibility of repentance, return and restoration in Deut 4 and 30, and implicitly in Lev 26).

These verbs for 'scattering' are rendered in Greek using διασπείρω, which then becomes the substrata for the concept of diaspora. In this way, the motif functions to differentiate the divine act of forced displacement from mere punitive destruction, painting it as an act of restrained chastisement meant for purification and regeneration. For the secular viewpoint, it was merely an imperial practice of deportation. Still, for the theologised biblical point of view, the people forced into migration were not mere deportees. Still, rather they were

to recognise themselves as a divinely dispersed diaspora awaiting the divine act of re-gathering. Thus, this reading could apply to all future readers of these texts.

Conclusion

What the Hebrew scribes do with their tragic history through theologisation transforms their memory of the past, challenges the readers in the present, and evokes higher expectations for the future. While deportation in these texts becomes a typological representation for the experience of being away from God's presence, the concept of being scattered by God himself, with the possibility of being re-gathered in the future, remains an everlasting source of hope. The agricultural metaphor of 'scattering' used in this motif communicates the idea that the people are scattered by YHWH with the potential to be transplanted or re-gathered later, not permanently destroyed. Therefore, the displaced people can self-identify later as a diaspora: perceiving themselves not as rejected weeds but as scattered seeds.