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The Jewish Diaspora: Historical, Marital and Religious Developments



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Abstract

His Beatitude Daniel, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, has proclaimed 2021 the Solemn Year of pastoral care of

Romanians abroad. Is there any connection that can be drawn between the Jewish diaspora during the Babylonian captivity and, afterward, the current Orthodox Christian diaspora? The reasons why a diaspora appears are similar throughout human history. People are ontologically the same, and the social, cultural, and religious context in which these great migrations occur is often similar. We can identify parallels and mutual lessons that can help us understand these events much better, prevent them by noticing the causes in time and learn valuable lessons of history from the past, but also from the present. In this study, we will see the effects that the diaspora phenomenon had on the Jews during the Babylonian captivity and on its return. This will help us understand what could be learned by the Orthodox Christian diasporas of today, which, like the Jews of old, live among foreigners, far from their national, religious, and cultural center. Therefore, the diaspora is essentially experiencing a revitalization of the faith in a foreign land and among people of a foreign faith.

Keywords

Orthodox Christian diaspora, Jewish diaspora, Babylonian captivity, Abraham, Judith, Exile, marriage

1 The Jewish exile – historical context and social and religious repercussions

“By the waters of Babylon, we sat and mourned, nostalgic for Zion; we hung our harps on the willows of their banks. There, those who deported us invited us to sing; our oppressors invited

us to entertain them: 'Sing us the songs of Zion!' How can we sing one of Yahweh's songs in a foreign land? (Ps. 136:1-4)¹.

The 19th century witnessed the discovery of the prisms of Sennacherib². They are some of the most important biblical artifacts³ for confirming the historicity of Old Israel's existence as a political and religious entity. These prisms describe the siege led by Assyrian king Sennacherib (705-681 BC) against Jerusalem and the taking in captivity of king Hezekiah, just as the Old Testament relates in places like 2 Kgs. 18:17, 2 Chr. 32:9-12 and Isa. 36 and 37. The text of the prism that is now kept at the Oriental Institute of Chicago, written around the year 690 BC, regarding this event is the following: "As for the king of Judah, Hezekiah, who did not submit to my authority, I besieged and captured forty-six of his cities, along with many smaller towns [...] As for Hezekiah, I imprisoned him like a bird in a cage in his royal city, Jerusalem. Then we built a series of barriers around it, and we did not let anyone out through the city gates. The cities which I conquered I gave to the kings of Ashdod, Hezron, and Gaza."⁴ We

¹ The biblical texts quoted in this paper are our own translations from the original languages in which they were written. For the Hebrew text, we have used *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1967/77), and for the LXX text we have used *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006).

² There are three prisms: the Taylor prism, kept at the British Museum; the Oriental Institute of Chicago prism, and the Israel Museum of Jerusalem prism.

³ The concept of "biblical artifacts" is extremely important for biblical archaeology. It refers to various archaeological artifacts that are valuable evidence for the confirmation of biblical accounts. Their nature is varied; any statue, ceramic object, coin, or papyrus from the biblical period can be a "biblical artifact". They are closely related to the sciences of papyrology and epigraphy.

⁴ See Roberto López Montero, *El prisma de Senaquerib: Chicago OIM A2793: introducción, texto bilingüe y notas* (Madrid: Ediciones Universidad San Dámaso, 2014).

start by portraying this humiliating event recorded in history because it is exemplary for the relations between the Assyrians and the Israelites, culminating in the deportation of part of the latter to Babylon around 597-581 BC. Around 539 BC, Babylon falls because of the Persian king Cyrus II, and the Israelites (now self-proclaimed “Jews” because Israel became, in the Persian Empire, the province of Yehud) returned to their country with a new interpretation of their history and religion, and with a new worldview.

We will start with Abraham. He is presented as the son of Terah (Gen. 11:26), the ninth after Noah (11:24), and the brother of Nahor and Haran (11:27). According to biblical references such as those noted in ch. 11:31, or some biblical “creeds” of the Israelites, such as the one in Joshua 24, the family comes from Ur of the Chaldeans.. Was that so? A philological and historical-critical study could lead us to other conclusions. Gen. 12:6 writes, in the original Hebrew: **אָז וַהֲבַעַנְנִי מִזֶּמְרָה אֶלְיוֹן עַד שְׁלֹם מְקוֹם עַד בְּאֶרֶץ אַבְרָם וַיַּעְבֵּר בְּאֶרֶץ** (“And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Shechem, to the turpentine of Moreh⁵, and the Canaanites were [then] in the land.”). The documentary hypothesis, due to which the German biblical scholar and historian Julius Wellhausen is best known, attributes, according to some readings, a post-exilic origin to the early cycle of Abraham. In the previous quote, we outlined the word **עָבַר**, which can be translated as “to cross.” The text could imply that Abraham is crossing the country in which he already is, not that he comes from elsewhere, if we read it as a Yahwist or Elohist text, and not a Deuteronomist one. This is just a theory, but it is worth considering. It should also be borne in mind that the latest investigations⁶ regarding the composition

⁵ Also known as the “Oak of Mamre.”

⁶ Bernard Renaud, *La alianza en el corazón de la Torá* (Estella: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2009), p. 13.

of the Pentateuch date these texts that comprise the saga of Abraham either during the exile itself or in the years following the return from the Babylonian captivity. Why is it so? For example, the term “Chaldea” did not appear before the 7th century BC. Therefore, it seems to start with the settlement of the Israelites in Babylon in the 6th century BC. Such a textual reconstruction, one that avoids the post-exilic text, leads us to quite different conclusions. Abraham would only be an inhabitant of the land, like everyone else. He would not be coming from Ur of the Chaldeans. But how can we conclude that some texts are post-exilic insertions? For example, in Genesis 2:4 et seq., we see a retelling of the Creation account presented in the first chapter. The mixing of both Creation accounts (Gen. 1:1 to 2:3; 2:5 and the following), which in some places have apparent contradictions, was done by the hand of a post-exilic editor. The bridge between both is verse 2:4: וְהָאָרֶץ הַשְּׁמַיִם תּוֹלְדוֹת אֵלֶּה: (“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth”), which uses the same literary tool used in Gen. 25:19 through 28:5-9: the *toledot*. The Creation account is related by making use of the same genealogical concerns typical of the post-exilic period because the post-exilic history and religious and social practices of Judaism could not have been justified without them being anchored in Israel’s glorious past. This is a legitimizing process similar, for example, to that of pseudo-epigraphy, which is so present in the biblical and extra-biblical world. It is through methods like this one that we can theorize about when a text was written.

But how did the *gôlâ*⁷ perceive Abraham? As we have said, the founding figures of Israel have been reinterpreted as having particular relevance in a post-exilic and extra-Palestinian context such as that of the diaspora. At a time when the basic institutions

⁷ The Jewish diaspora.

of Israel, the Temple, and the monarchy, disappeared, a time in which even their original name, Israelites⁸, is changed, their homeland becomes Scripture⁹. Their homeland is no longer the country they lost, but the security offered by a history permanently written and immutable, preserved in the sacred texts. Thus is the permanent return to the founding figures explained, something that is also seen in the post-exilic biblical literature, in the remembrance of the fact that, although exiled, the Jews are the descendants of the first Israelites through a continuous and uninterrupted line. We see a proof of this, for example, in the Old Testament texts originally written in Greek (which are post-exilic). In Dan. 3:35 (a fragment that does not appear in the original Hebrew) we read: “καὶ μὴ ἀποστήσης τὸ ἔλεός σου ἀφ’ ἡμῶν διὰ Ἀβρααμ τὸν ἡγαπημένον ὑπὸ σοῦ καὶ διὰ Ἰσαακ τὸν δοῦλόν σου καὶ Ἰσραηλ τὸν ἅγιόν σου, (“And take not thy mercy from us, for Abraham, whom thou lovest, and for Isaac, thy servant, and for Israel, thy holy one).” In Tbt. 4:12, we read: “Νωε, Ἀβρααμ, Ἰσαακ, Ἰακωβ οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob; our fathers of old...)”. In Odes 12:1, we read: “Κύριε παντοκράτωρ, ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν, τοῦ Ἀβρααμ καὶ Ἰσαακ καὶ Ἰακωβ καὶ τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῶν τοῦ δικαίου” (Lord Almighty, God of our fathers; of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their righteous descendants)”, and the examples can continue. Even if they were deported among foreigners, torn from their na-

⁸ The Israelites now become יְהוּדִים (Yehudim), taking their name from the Persian province of “Yehud”, which is how Judah will be named after it will be conquered by the Persian Empire. For a larger study of this particular historical, social, and cultural context, see Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period: Yehud - A History of the Persian Province of Judah* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004).

⁹ For more details, see Hans de Wit, *En la dispersión el texto es patria* (San José: Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana, 2002).

tional, religious, and cultural center, they were constantly remembering their history and past with even their language being forgotten. The post-exilic books of the Bible that were written in Greek, later added to the *Tanakh*¹⁰, have not forgotten the founding figure of the Israelite people and their religion. Such paradigmatic and crucial figures for the history of the Jews are of vital importance, especially since the other institutions we have mentioned no longer exist. Thus, their identity will now be based on entirely different elements. The Belgian biblical scholar Jean-Louis Ska¹¹ states that the Code of Holiness will insist upon the existence of a “holy” and “consecrated” people, separated from the other nations. Israel is no longer an independent and sovereign nation, so the identity of the Jews now comes from their history and religious institutions: The Law and the new Temple.

As we have stated already, the constant return to the past and the imitation of the examples given by the ancestors become widely practiced by the Jews living among foreigners. In Jdt. 8:26 we read: μνήσθητε ὅσα ἐποίησεν μετὰ Ἀβρααμ καὶ ὅσα ἐπείρασεν τὸν Ἰσαακ καὶ ὅσα ἐγένετο τῷ Ἰακωβ ἐν Μεσοποταμίᾳ τῆς Συρίας ποιμαίνοντι τὰ πρόβατα Λαβαν τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ (“Remember what [the Lord] did to Abraham, how he tested Isaac, and what happened to Jacob in Mesopotamia, in Syria, when he was tending the flocks of Laban, his mother’s brother”). After finding themselves alone among foreigners, there was born in their midst an almost pathological necessity to

¹⁰ תנ"ך, the Hebrew biblical canon, which comprises the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, the two books of Samuel, the two books of the Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the twelve smaller prophets, Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Kohelet, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the two books of the Chronicles.

¹¹ Jean-Louis SKA, *Introducción a la lectura del Pentateuco* (Estella: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2001), p. 257.

“live in the past” and to proudly reaffirm their history and ancestors in front of everyone. This history will become the intangible foundation of the Jewish people. From this perspective, we can also understand the Code of Holiness, the insistence on being separated from the גוֹיִם, (“goyim,” meaning “nations”), the laws and rules unique in terms of sexual intercourse and the laws related to death, illness or any other aspect of the daily life, whose primary purpose is to preserve the identity of a people that clearly sense its existence threatened. At this moment arises among the Jews the constant need to establish and delimit new boundaries, especially in terms of everyday life, to not lose their uniqueness. The remembrance and imitation of the past will go as far as trying to create a state within a state, to restore the old Israelite monarchy, and to be an independent nation again. However, Persia will intervene quickly and end any such thought. Abraham is, in consequence, not only the father of the world’s believers that trace their faith in God all the way back to him, but he also is the eternal paradigm of the migrant and the changes brought by migration. The biblical viewpoint regarding his origins may seem monolithic, but it also leaves room for interpretation. The paradigm of the Abrahamic exodus has its theological foundation in the general paradigm of vocation. God is the one that is calling Abraham towards a land, a place of blessing. The concrete expression of this blessing will be the “land flowing with milk and honey” (Exod. 3:8). The promised land, Canaan, represents the change in paradigm after the exodus through the Sea of Reeds. The promise and the One who promises, stay the same.

2 Mixed marriages during and after the Jewish exile

Marriage was one of the main pillars that were left intact in the post-exilic Jewish society. If the state, the monarchy, and the Temple no longer existed, all that remained was local and domestic religiosity. Local religiosity culminated in the increased importance that the synagogue received in this period. The Temple, the priesthood, and the cultic rituals no longer existed, but the scriptures and teachings¹² never left the people of Israel. Gathering for the study of the Law and prayer in the synagogues have their origin in the pre-exilic period, not in the post-Roman one.¹³ Domestic religiosity involves, first and foremost, marriage. Without sovereignty or elements and institutions that are visible and clearly identifiable for them to provide an identity, living in the diaspora context paves the way for sectarian dualist behavior: us - them. The notion of “identity” is mainly based on differentiation. A subject has its own identity only when it is different from some other subject. Identity, therefore, is offered primarily by delineation¹⁴. The first element that threatens the

¹² The 6th century BC represents an early stage in the formation of the biblical canon. We do not know exactly what books or biblical texts already existed in that particular *Sitz im Leben*, or in what form or stage were they, but modern critics generally accept that there was a pre-exilic collection of books that were considered, to varying degrees, canonical. King Josiah (648-609 BC) commissioned Hilkiah, the High Priest, to restore the temple using money raised from the previous years' taxes. He finds in the temple the *הַתּוֹרָה בְּסֵפֶר*, "the Book of the Law" (4Kgs. 22:8). That discovery produces a powerful change in Josiah, which will make him revitalize the cultic practices, removing paganism from the midst of the Israelites. This story represents an early so-called biblical proof of the Deuteronomic sources and some fragments that existed before the post-exilic reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah.

¹³ Avi'am Mordekhai, *First-Century Galilee New Discoveries* (Early Christianity 9.2, 2018), p. 219-226.

¹⁴ Phillip Essler, *Conflicto e identidad en la carta a los Romanos* (Estella: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2006), p. 39.

uniqueness of Israel in the diaspora is the merging with the society to which they have been exiled. The first gateway to this mixture among the Jews is marriage. Pre-exilic writings, beginning with the Pentateuch, offer testimonies that are only seemingly contradictory because they become clear once we identify that they come from different literary compositions. What can be said with certainty is that the phenomenon of exile has led to a radical rethinking of marriage, its nature, and its validity. To understand the entire history of Jewish marriage, we must not look at its crescent chronological evolution because the peak point that would define both the history of the past and the perspective of Jewish marriage lies within the reformation of Ezra and Nehemiah.

After returning from exile, Ezra begins to reform Israel's religious and moral paradigm: *וַיִּרְעוּ וְהִתְעַרְבוּ וּלְבָנֵיהֶם לָהֶם מִבְּנוֹתֵיהֶם כִּי־נָשְׂאוּ: וַיִּדְרֹשׁ הַקֹּדֶשׁ רַאשׁוֹנָה הַזֶּה בְּמַעַל הַזֵּוָה וְהַסְּגָוִים הַשָּׂרִים וַיִּדְרֹשׁ הָאֲרָצוֹת בְּעַמֵּי הַקֶּדְשׁ* ("Indeed, the Israelites have taken their daughters [as wives] for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed has been mixed with the people of the land. And the leaders and officials have taken the lead in this unfaithfulness!", Ezra 9:2). This is Ezra's first and foremost reformative preoccupation. The new covenant that the people will make with God could not take place if such a great *מעל*, ("maal", meaning "betrayal," "lawlessness," "infidelity") had been performed. The correction for this sin will be divorce: "So now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all the foreign wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the command of our God. Let it be done according to the Law" (Ezra 10:3). Such a radical and unprecedented attitude in the history of Israel is only the product of a people who perceive their existence and identity as being threatened. We know that these attitudes did not exist before the phenomenon of exile. Abraham binds his servant with an oath so

as not to take a wife for his son Isaac from the daughters of Canaan: מִבְּנוֹת לְבָנֵי אִשָּׁה תִּקַּח - לֹא אֲשֶׁר הָאָרֶץ וְאֵלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֱלֹהֵי בְּיַהוָה וְאֲשֶׁר־עִדָּה מִבְּנוֹת לְבָנֵי אִשָּׁה תִּקַּח יוֹשֵׁב אֲדָמָה וְאֵלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵלֹהֵי הָאָרֶץ: (“And I will make you swear to Yahweh, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from among the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I live,” Gen. 24:3). This is the same commandment that Isaac gave his son before Jacob fled to Laban: אִשָּׁה תִּקַּח לֹא - כָּנְעָן מִבְּנוֹת מִבְּנוֹת מִבְּנוֹת מִבְּנוֹת (“Thou shalt not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan” Gen. 28:1). Even if these are the earliest prohibitions of this kind, they are under the aegis of anachronism because these texts, according to modern biblical criticism, have Deuteronomistic origins. How else could we explain the saga of Joseph (Genesis 37-50)? This literary composition, considered to be truly pre-exilic and pre-monarchical, does not show this interdiction. However, chronologically and canonically speaking, it took place after the lives of the first three patriarchs. Joseph is given in marriage by Pharaoh the daughter of a heathen priest: לְאִשָּׁה אֲן פְּתוֹרָה פְּרַעֲוֹתִי בַת- אֲסֵנַת אֶת- וַיִּתֵּן-לּוֹ (“And Pharaoh gave [Joseph] to Asenath, daughter of Potiphra, from 'On, to be his wife”, Gen. 41:45).

To Moses, as well, was given the daughter of a Midianite priest: לְמִיֶּשֶׁה בְּתוּרָה צִפּוֹרָה אֶת- וַיִּתֵּן (“And [Jethro] gave Zipporah, his daughter, to Moses,” Exod. 2:21), whose name was Jethro (or Reuel, or Hobab, as he is also called) and who was a Kenite priest, who was not a descendant of Abraham, because the Kenites were already living in the Promised Land when God promises it to Abraham as an inheritance (Gen. 15:19). As we see, the prohibition advocated by Abraham and Isaac is unique in this historical period, which is another indicator of its later insertion having a legitimizing intent to prevent a possible religious, cultural, and social intermingling between Israelites and other people. We mentioned that this “school of thought” is post-exilic, but that period’s mindset was not monolithic in this regard. The book of

Ruth was written in the same timeframe as Ezra and Nehemiah. While the last two books show a strong aversion and intransigence towards mixed marriages, the book of Ruth was written in the same period precisely to justify them. The sons of Elimelech and Naomi, being Israelites, took two wives from the women of Moab: וַיִּשְׂאוּ לָהֶם נְשִׁים מֵאֲבוֹת נָשִׁים מֹאבִיּוֹת וְשֵׁם עֶרְפָּה הָאֶחָת וְשֵׁם רוּת הַשְּׁנִיָּת (‘‘And they took for themselves, Moabite wives. The name of the first one was Orpha, and the name of the second one was Ruth,’’ Ruth 1:4). Although this book was written after the return from exile, it is set in the time of the Judges (Ruth 1:1), having the same intent as the prohibition against mixed marriages which was placed in the time and person of Abraham, which is the legitimization and the giving of weight and historicity to the belief supported by it. Ezra-Nehemiah and Ruth display two opposing ‘‘schools of thought’’ that coexisted during the exilic period and the return from it. In the official Jewish priestly current, the one that will end up imposing itself and evolving naturally into what we call today ‘‘Pharisaism,’’ any acceptance of mixed marriages was refused. Still, we see, through books like Ruth or the pre-exilic ones, that this mindset was not universally accepted.

3 Religious changes during and after the Jewish exile

The first aspect that draws our attention to the religious changes that the exile brings is the difference between the religious practices displayed, for example, by the patriarchs and the judges and those of the Jews that returned from Babylon. Many of the biblical texts contained in the Pentateuch indeed come from a later edition, though it is difficult to determine which were the original texts that were later completed in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and later on when their religion was revitalized, it is certain that there was pre-exilic material. This is not required, however,

to identify a religious evolution within the Israelite people before and after the exile. We will turn our attention to the pre-monarchical religious period, to be more precise, and how it differs almost to the core from the period that begins with the return from Babylonian captivity.

We will analyze comparatively two paradigmatic figures regarding the worship of the same God for us to see two forms of practicing the same religion. The first example is, again, that of Abraham. Gen. 12:8b writes: “וַיִּבֶן אֶת-בְּרִיתֵי יְהוָה וַיִּקְרָא אֶל-יְהוָה (And [Abraham] built there an altar to Yahweh and called upon Yahweh’s name).” This example is sufficient because the other instances in which Abraham demonstrates his religiosity share the same structure. Let us compare this form of practicing religion to that of Judith. We read in Jdt. 8:6: “καὶ ἐνήστευε πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς χηρεύσεως αὐτῆς χωρὶς προσαββάτων καὶ σαββάτων καὶ προνουμηνιῶν καὶ νουμηνιῶν καὶ ἑορτῶν καὶ χαρμοσυνῶν οἴκου Ἰσραὴλ (And she fasted all the days of her widowhood, except the day before the sabbath and the sabbath [itself], the day before the new moon and the day of the new moon, and the feasts and days of rejoicing of the house of Israel)”, while in Jdt. 9:1 we read: “Ἰουδιθ δὲ ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον καὶ ἐπέθετο σποδὸν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς καὶ ἐγύμνωσεν ὃν ἐνεδεδύκει σάκκον, καὶ ἦν ἄρτι προσφερόμενον ἐν Ἱερουσαλημ εἰς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ τὸ θυμίαμα τῆς ἑσπέρας ἐκείνης, καὶ ἐβόησεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ Ἰουδιθ πρὸς κύριον καὶ εἶπεν (Judith, then, fell upon her face and put ashes on her head, and uncovered the sackcloth she was wearing; and at that very moment, when that evening’s incense was being offered in the house of God, in Jerusalem, Judith cried out to the Lord with a loud voice, and said)”. Abraham’s worship is spontaneous, free, and is not marked by cultic prescriptions. Instead, the religious manifestations of Judith denote systematic worship where no element is left to chance. Before showing us how she prays, the author of

the book needs to point out that Judith held the reglementary fast except on Saturdays (another proof of the importance that was placed on the Biblical Sabbath in the post-exilic period, being a distinctive sign among a foreign people and one of the sure religious elements that could not be taken from the Jews) and on other significant days of the lunar calendar. The fact that the author considered it necessary to emphasize these practices of the protagonist gives us an idea of what the religion of the Israelites was like at that time. Although they worship the same God and are part of the same religion, we see that the emphasis is being placed upon completely different aspects.

While Abraham's worship is, as we said, natural, the Book of Judith shows us the complete opposite. This is a post-exilic book, written in Greek and added to the Septuagint as part of the canon. Judith claims that she is part of Abraham's faith and that she is his successor, worshipping the same God as her ancestors, but we see that worship is extremely different in both cases. Judith is the epitome of the spirituality of the Pharisees. Extremely attentive to the ritual part and the fulfillment of the letter of the Law, we see that she is willing to do anything to save her people, whether it be to give herself bodily to Holofernes, to kill him, or to lie and deceive to achieve her goal; however, she is not at all willing to break the dietary restrictions and rituals of her religion, as we read in Jdt. 12:1b-2: "καὶ συνέταξεν καταστρῶσαι αὐτῇ ἀπὸ τῶν ὀψοποιημάτων αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦ οἴνου αὐτοῦ πίνειν καὶ εἶπεν Ἰουδιθ οὐ φάγομαι ἐξ αὐτῶν ἵνα μὴ γένηται σκάνδαλον ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν ἠκολουθηκότων μοι χορηγηθήσεται (And [Holofernes] ordered them to set a table for her with some of his own food and to serve her with his own wine, and Judith said: I will not eat it, lest it is a scandal; but I will be provided from the things I have brought with me)."

She also asked Holofernes to allow her to go out each night to ritually bathe herself and to pray, as Jdt. 12:7b describes: "καὶ

ἐξεπορεύετο κατὰ νύκτα εἰς τὴν φάραγγα Βαιτυλουα καὶ ἐβαπτίζετο ἐν τῇ παρεμβολῇ ἐπὶ τῆς πηγῆς τοῦ ὕδατος (And [Judith] went out each night to the valley of Bethulia and bathed at the spring in the camp).” In contrast to this religious behavior, we contemplate the worship of Abraham, which, as we have seen, was not performed according to any prescribed rule and did not follow any ritual commandment. Rather he built an altar to Yahweh anywhere for sacrifice and worship. What is the reason for this enormous difference when it comes to praying to the same deity? We can attribute this distinction to an alleged cultic evolution in Israel, as is often done, but the word “evolution” presupposes a value judgment and implies a change from the lower to the higher. Of course, we can see that there is a change, but is this change an evolution, though? German biblical scholar Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) and biblical criticism, in general, speak of the progressive degeneration of Israel’s religion. Yahwist¹⁵ religion is genuine, natural, spontaneous, and free, as is the case of Abraham. Ritual sacrifices were determined by nature’s phenomena and daily life’s occurrences. With Deuteronomy begins, according to the author, a process of degeneration accompanied by a progressive centralization and ritualization of religion, where the liturgical calendar combined with historical remembrances and mathematical calculations become more important than the rhythms of nature (Deut. 15:1; 16:9-20). This process reaches its peak in the religion established by the post-exilic priesthood, where legalism and ritualism hide the freedom of the human spirit. Religion detaches itself from concrete, daily life and encloses itself in priestly abstractions.¹⁶

¹⁵ Named like this because of the documentary hypothesis (DH), which, as we have mentioned, attributes a pre-monarchic origin to Yahwist and Elohist biblical sources.

¹⁶ For more information, see Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

The canonical reading speaks of another phenomenon, however; of how God progressively revealed the worship that was to be brought to Him in Israel and how the celebrations and commemorations of the past would become a fundamental component not only of the worship that would be pleasing to Him but also of the preservation of the identity of the people in the place where they were. Judith is an exemplary exponent of the rigorous Pharisaic piety of the Jewish religion, just as Abraham is the exemplary exponent of the primitive and simple form of worshipping the same Yahweh. Both are two ends of the same religion, one before the exile and the other after the exile.

4 Conclusions

What teachings can Orthodox Christians, in their own “exiles,” draw from all these occurrences? That will be left for the reader to judge. However, we could summarize the experience of the Jews in the diaspora and the Babylonian captivity in the following general lines. First of all, the migrant status has become one that will accompany the Israelites for the rest of their lives, but one that will also put its mark on Christians. In this sense, we can say that the Babylonian diaspora and captivity are an Old Testament foreshadowing of the life that Christians will lead until the Second Coming. Abraham will become the father of the faithful, who will not be limited only to the people of Israel but will be a transnational and interreligious figure, a true *páter árchon*. The interfaith and mixed marriages that caused so much controversy after returning from exile point to two “schools of thought” that existed simultaneously in Israel at that moment. This is also a problem that the Church faces today, even more so in places where Orthodox Christians are a minority. Finally, we see the differences in spirituality that have evolved in Israel after the exilic

period. Books like Judith or Tobit show us a form of spirituality and of practicing a religion that is very different from that of the ancestors of the Jews, the patriarchs, but one that has essentially the same fundamentals. A similar situation is experienced by Orthodox Christians that come from traditionally Orthodox countries, and that find themselves alone among people that have other faiths, but it can also be experienced by people that come from different faiths but convert to Orthodoxy, thus perhaps becoming “strangers” among people who do not share nor understand their views. For certain, there is much to be learned and paralleled between the two diasporic phenomena – that of the Jews and that of modern Orthodox Christians –, and the Old Testament stands as it always has, as a fountain of learning and examples that guide Christians throughout the ages.

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