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Article

Resilience and Return in Isaiah—Using Resilience Theory in Hebrew Scripture Theology

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Abstract: The article analyses the theology of homecoming in the book of Isaiah and makes a case for using resilience theory as a hermeneutical frame for the task of Hebrew Scripture theology. Defined as "positive adaptation despite adversity", resilience builds on the crisis setting of wide parts of the Hebrew Scriptures and demonstrates that the formation of theology represents a resilience discourse. In the case of the Isaianic prophecies of return, three concepts of return are distinguished (return, gathering and homecoming, a second Exodus) that respond to the adversities of exile and diaspora. Thus, the prophecies offer a literary home that the different religious communities through time can inhabit.

Keywords: Hebrew Scripture theology; book of Isaiah; prophecy; resilience; return; homecoming

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1. Introduction

Within the traditional division of Old Testament studies—especially in a Christian theological setting—the theology of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible occupies a special position. However, it is safe to suggest that the task "has been unclear from the beginning" (Schmid 2015, p. 1), with its definition and unique features ever changing. The following argument outlines a contribution to the field of Hebrew Scripture theology[1] that builds on the literary formation conditions of the Hebrew Bible but offers a distinct systematic principle with the implementation of resilience theory. I want to show that the resilience discourse in the humanities offers a helpful hermeneutical framework that bridges the gap between historical-critical exegesis and the theological discussion in other disciplines. In the following, the first part discusses the major challenges of the task of Hebrew Scripture theology and then demonstrates the unique contribution of resilience studies. The discussion will start from a review of trauma studies, which have a longer history of reception in biblical exegesis and partly overlap with the resilience discourse. In its second part, the article offers a case study that analyses the theology of return in the book of Isaiah through the lens of resilience. I will end with a short summary, coming back to the question what resilience has to offer for Hebrew Scripture theology.

2. A New Approach

2.1. Challenges for Hebrew Scripture Theology

Scholarship defines biblical theology as the explanation of the basic beliefs that are expressed in the scriptural writings.[2] As such, the task is essential to foster the dialogue between biblical studies and any other theological discipline that draws on the later canonical collections. Its origins go back to the 17th century, when the emergence of the historical-critical perspective established biblical studies as a distinct field of research, separate from (Christian) dogmatic theology.[3] Since then, scholarship has continued to discuss the relationship between the historical origins of the scriptural writings and the normative claims of a systematic approach.[4] This has been especially pertinent with regard to Old Testament theology that was early on established as a task distinct from New Testament theology. The writings of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible have a long and complex history of literary

development, which means that theology already has a history within the books themselves.[5] Consequently, different levels of meaning and their "normativity" have to be distinguished within the Hebrew Scriptures. While in the last decades of the 20th century, the predominant discussion focused on the differentiation between the religious history of Ancient Israel and the theology of the Old Testament,[6] contributions in the last twenty years have centred on the interdependence between literary history and theology, which results in new questions about the specific characteristics of the task.[7] It adds to the complexity of the discussion that in the past, the separation lines between historical and normative showed a tendency to align with different faith traditions. The normative claims of Christian biblical theology have been the object of extensive discussion as well as the challenging statement that "Jews are not interested in biblical theology".[8] At present, the scholarly landscape in the field of Old Testament/Hebrew Bible theology shows a welcome diversification of approaches that investigate the state of theology (or theologies) in the scriptural books. What continues to be discussed, however, is the increasing gap between a descriptive approach that proceeds from the complex literary history of the writings (Rom-Shiloni 2016; Schmid 2019), and a normative approach that favours a systematic outline (Spieckermann and Feldmeier 2011; Moberly 2015).

To my mind, the starting point for a Hebrew Scripture theology should be the development of the scriptural writings, as the theological contents can only be studied under due consideration of their respective literary and historical settings.[9] It is a common misunderstanding that the historical-critical perspective always seeks an absolute dating of a text and its original meaning. Rather, the approach aims at a literary and historical differentiation of a textual unit in relation to other texts and sets limits to what interpretation is appropriate—it goes without saying that the results of this critical investigation are always open for discussion in the light of new evidence or insights. I thus want to argue for a descriptive approach that involves the question what ancient authors had to say about their God, and how these ideas and theorems have developed over time. If this "historical quantifier"[10] is curtailed, the texts lose the ability both to speak about their own times and to be interpreted responsibly for present audiences. This does not mean, however, that the task of Hebrew Scripture theology should merge with literary history. Rather, any theology is in need of a systematising principle that builds on the specific formation conditions of the scriptures. When it comes to the formation conditions of the Hebrew writings, the history of Ancient Israel can aptly be described as a series of crises and disasters. It does not only comprise the military capture of the northern kingdom of Israel (722 BCE) and the southern kingdom of Judah (587 BCE), but also long-lasting periods of foreign dominion, migration, and displacement.[11] This means that any study of theological ideas in the Hebrew Scriptures needs to consider these circumstances, which opens up the exegetical discourse to the hermeneutics of trauma and resilience. While there is some overlap between the two approaches, I want to show that resilience theory is more promising when it comes to Hebrew Scripture theology.

2.2. From Trauma to Resilience

A clear definition and demarcation of trauma theories and resilience studies is still pending, with the scholarly discourse dominated by the field of trauma. Biblical studies have fruitfully employed the trauma discourse as a hermeneutical frame to interpret the end of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah as traumatic events that triggered wide parts of the scriptural writings as coping literature (O'Connor 2014; Frechette 2015; Garber 2015; Boase and Frechette 2016b). In 2013, the Society of Biblical Literature inaugurated the program unit "Biblical Literature and the Hermeneutics of Trauma", which has been going strong ever since. Furthermore, several collected volumes have been published that focus on the study of the biblical books as literary responses to trauma (Kelle et al. 2011; Becker et al. 2014; Boase and Frechette 2016a). While trauma first found its way into biblical scholarship through the poetry of Lamentations (e.g., Linafelt 2002; Reimer 2002; O'Connor 2002), the approach took root fully in studies on the prophetic literature. Especially the

three Major Prophets have attracted attention, as their characters can be understood to reflect the traumatic experiences of the people (O'Connor 2012; Poser 2012). These studies certainly proved ground-breaking and opened up exciting new avenues for the field. However, the implementation of insights from psychological trauma runs the danger of putting down the ancient authors on the proverbial Freudian couch and diagnosing them with posttraumatic stress disorder.[12] Scholarship does not have access to the authors' minds, but only to their texts. Subsuming whole books as a single response to trauma does not only disregard their complex literary history, but it also ignores that the texts are highly sophisticated pieces of literature that developed over time (Dietrich 2022, p. 71; Ammann 2022, p. 362). Furthermore, the interpretation of literary phenomena such as repetitions, inconsistencies, or changes of topic and scene as expressions of traumatic experiences fails to engage with the traditional understanding as literary seams and evidence of rewriting—a phenomenon that is well documented in material evidence (see, e.g., Müller et al. 2014; Zahn 2020).

More appropriate to the interpretation of the biblical writings seems to be the idea of cultural trauma that originated in social sciences. Different to the understanding of the (individual) psychological trauma that as an "unclaimed experience" has not been processed fully by the victim, the cultural trauma represents a "claimed experience".[13] Through this lens, a community creates a "master narrative" (Alexander 2004, pp. 12–15) in reaction to the identification of a source of suffering; this trauma narrative creates meaning and supports social cohesion and group identity. The idea of cultural trauma has had a notable impact on the discussion in text-based humanities, analysing different pieces of literature as sources of religious and cultural reflections on trauma. With regard to the Hebrew Bible, the hypothesis of a master narrative about the destruction of Jerusalem can offer an explanation why the military invasion of a small kingdom in the Ancient Near East had such a major impact on the literary production of its religious communities. The concept of cultural trauma also suggests that the formation of the collective memory incorporating the cultural trauma is a process (Ammann 2022, pp. 362–71); it thus offers an appropriate framework for the complex literary development of the Hebrew Bible.

The question is how resilience fits into this picture. In the context of trauma studies, resilience usually comes into view as the overcoming of the traumatisation. By way of example, the most important study so far, David Carr's monograph on *Holy Resilience* (2015), proceeds from the assumption that survivors of trauma "develop a deeper resilience and grow in unforeseen ways" (Carr 2015, p. 5). This understanding, however, represents an underestimation of the potential of the resilience discourse.[14] The concept of resilience first emerged in developmental psychology, where the focus was on the individual child/the adolescent and their positive adaptation to risk with the help of protective factors.[15] Over the years, the debate has shifted from the description of static baseline characteristics to dynamic mechanisms of coping and adaptation. Widely acknowledged is the definition by Suniya S. Luthar (2006), who describes resilience as a two-dimensional construct "representing positive adaptation despite adversity" (Luthar 2006, p. 740). Following this definition, resilience is a phenomenon of crisis that comprises three components: (1) the experience of significant risk or adversity, (2) the utilisation of resources to cope, and (3) a positive outcome.

In comparing this understanding of resilience with the concept of trauma, it becomes clear that resilience is more than post-traumatic growth or recovery. The description as a phenomenon of crisis widens the narrow focus on one traumatic event and replaces it with the idea of continuous adversities. This offers a well-suited reading perspective for the development of biblical literature and applies to a wider range of texts. Furthermore, the focus changes from deficits to resources and thus, the implementation of resilience theory in biblical studies contributes to the wider interdisciplinary discourse on how religion and spirituality foster resilience.[16] As to the positive outcome, through the lens of resilience, the formation and transmission of the Hebrew Bible represents a success story that laid the foundations for biblical Judaism. In contrast, the religion of other cultures disappeared,

when their political and religious institutions ceased to exist. This brings me finally to the connections between resilience and Hebrew Scripture theology. The use of resilience theory as hermeneutical framework for a theology accounts for the fact that the biblical writings are not the deskwork of systematic theologians, but they are literature born from crisis. Their historic setting suggests that they originated in times, when the loss of temple, king, and nationhood acted as stressors that put to the test the relationship between the God of Israel and his people. Hence, I want to suggest that the history of theology in the biblical writings represents a resilience discourse that redrafts the foundations of belief, and fosters the identity and agency of God and his people alike.

3. Resilience and Return in Isaiah

3.1. The Language of Return

The following exegetical argument offers a case study of a Hebrew Scripture theology through the lens of resilience, focusing on the conception of return in the book of Isaiah. This topic represents an ideal test case, as the promises of return and homecoming are major topics of salvation that address the adversities of Babylonian exile and later diaspora. I will ask how the different prophetic texts conceive of return and homecoming, and demonstrate that they represent a resilience discourse. Obviously, there is not one clearly defined idea of migration and return, but different images and terms occur that are constantly developed and reformulated throughout the history of theology in the book.[17] A safe starting point is the differentiation of the Hebrew verbs used in the prophecies of return, which lead to three distinct ideas of homecoming: The first set of texts speaks of a return to Zion, using the Hebrew verb שוב(35:10; 51:11: 52:8). A second group employs the combination of the verbs קבץand בוא, focusing on gathering and homecoming (43:5; 49:18; 60:4). Finally, a third set conveys the idea of an Exodus from exile and diaspora, with a noted preference for the key Exodus verbs יצאand עלה(11:16; 48:20; 52:11). Starting from an analysis of these materials, the following argument will develop further group characteristics and help to trace the theology of migration and return in the book.

First, the Hebrew verb שובdescribes homecoming in form of a return. It is initially used in the epilogue of Second Isaiah in 52:7–10 to describe the return of the God of Israel to Zion (52:8: בשוב יהוה ציון), where the deity will reign as king (52:7). There are two later redactional texts that supplement the return of the deity with the return of Yhwh's people. First, the short oracle in 51:10b–11 adds the joyful return to Zion and addresses the people as those that Yhwh had ransomed (51:11: ופדויי יהוה ישובון ובאו ציון). The formulation in 51:11 has an exact parallel in the detailed vision of Yhwh's theophany in 35:1–10, where the visionary account culminates in the return of Yhwh's ransomed ones on the holy way (35:10: ופדויי יהוה ישבון ובאו ציון). The need to return to Zion suggests a present absence, which is the main adversity addressed in this set of texts.

The prophecies activate different resources of resilience to adapt to this crisis, and I want to point out four ways how the texts constitute resilience. First, the epilogue in Isa 52:7–10 together with the prologue in 40:1–5 address the deity's absence from Zion in the aftermath of the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem in 587 BCE.[18] The destruction of city and temple had questioned the pre-exilic temple theology, according to which Yhwh's presence on Zion should have safeguarded the city.[19] The ancient authors dealt with this divine "crisis of identity" by implementing the idea from Mesopotamian sources that a deity could make a conscious decision to withdraw from their dwelling place.[20] Thus, the prologue in Isa 40:2 explains Yhwh's absence from Jerusalem as part of the divine punishment, in which the personified city is sanctioned for her transgressions. Against this background, the plot of prologue and epilogue boosts Yhwh's agency and describes his return to Zion as a triumphal procession to royal reign (52:7). It is God's sovereign choice to declare the end of Jerusalem's punishment (40:2) (Westermann 1969, p. 35) and reveal again his glory in the city (40:5; see also 60:1–3). The literary affirmation of Yhwh's agency, however, also impacts on the agency of the people. While the prologue calls to comfort the people of Yhwh (40:1: נחמו נחמו עמי), the ruins of Jerusalem break forth in joy in the epilogue,

"because Yhwh has comforted his people" (52:9: כי־נחם יהוה עמו). The change from the masculine plural imperative in 40:1 to the third person perfect tense in 52:9 indicates a literary performance of comforting, through which the mental state of the people has already been restored to well-being.[21] Yet while the affirmation of Yhwh's agency impacts positively on the people's resilience, their continued absence from Zion represents an adversity that threatens their agency. The later announcements of their return in 51:10 and 35:10 close this thematic gap, as the people's restored presence in Zion will allow them to participate in Yhwh's royal reign.

Second, the four prophecies of return use election terminology to foster the relationship between Yhwh and his people. Already the opening verse of the prologue establishes a close bond, when Yhwh marks the people with the suffix first person singular as his own (40:1: עמי).[22] The later use of the two participles גאולים and פדויי יהוה (51:10 and 35:10) further strengthens the idea of a special relationship between the deity and his people, and highlights Yhwh's saving action as an identity marker.

Third, the authors in this group of texts employ language of emotions as a literary device to build up inner strength.[23] Both in 52:8–9 and 35:1–2, the joyful expression of witnesses to Yhwh's theophany encourage a positive mindset and highlight the significance of the deity's return for people, land and city. However, while in these passages the people are a mere bystander to the exultation of landscape and city, in 51:11 and its parallel 35:10, the exuberant joy becomes an identity marker for those that are redeemed by Yhwh. No less than four nouns describe the positive emotions of the people on their return to Zion (ברנה ושמחת עולם על־ראשם ששון ושמחה ישיגון), while negative emotions are literally banished: "sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (נסו יגון ואנחה).

Fourth, the extended vision in 35:1–10 reads like a compendium of homecoming that fosters resilience by imagining an alternate view on reality.[24] In this vision, the adversities of existence in exile and diaspora are counterbalanced by Yhwh's theophany in the wilderness that has a beneficial effect on the whole cosmos. With regard to the people, the two imperative calls in 35:3 (אמצו ... חזקו) aim to restore the agency of those that are frightened, while the promises in 35:4–6a announce the healing of those that are physically handicapped. In modern terms, the vision provides for a complete restoration of mental and physical well-being. Similarly, the wilderness experiences a transformation by turning into a life-fostering habitat (35:6b–7). The visionary account further develops the motif of election in terms of a separation, as the special status of the people requires them to be set apart. Thus, the way of holiness (35:8: דרך הקדש, see 51:10: דרך), on which the people shall return to Zion is reserved for Yhwh's people; it protects them from bodily harm by animals (35:8) and ritual impurity through defilement (35:9). The account culminates in the announcement of the joyful return of those ransomed by Yhwh in 35:10. As discussed, the verse repeats the formulation of the prophecy in 51:11 and describes the return to Zion as the completion of restoration (ופדויי יהוה ישבון ובאו ציון ברנה ושמחת עולם על־ראשם ששון ושמחה ישיגו ונסו יגון ואנחה).[25] Overall, the theophany in Isa 35 offers a comprehensive vision of salvation that connects Yhwh's theophany and the subsequent return of his people to a vision of guided return. From the perspective of resilience, it develops a utopia, an alternate view on present realities that tames adversities and elevates homecoming to the pinnacle of salvation.[26]

The second group of texts speaks of return in terms of gathering and homecoming, using the combination of the two Hebrew verbs קבץ and בוא. The first text is the extended Zion oracle in 49:14–23, in which Yhwh promises to personified Zion that her children will gather and come to her (49:18: נקבצו באו־לך). The oracle in 60:1–4 continues this promise (60:4: נקבצו באו־לך), while in the prophecy 43:5–7, Yhwh announces that he will gather and bring home the worldwide diaspora (43:5: ממזרח אביא זרעך וממערב אקבצך). The basic adversity in this set of texts is the dispersion and isolation of the people—first in exile and then among the foreign nations—that threatens their identity. The prophecies address these crises of identity through different literary strategies. First, the oracle in 49:14–23 belongs to the so-called Zion continuations[27] in Second Isaiah and uses the personification of Zion

as a mediator of resilience. The text starts from a lament in the mouth of the city/woman, who feels forsaken and forgotten by Yhwh (49:14: עזבני יהוה ואדני שכחני). Replying, Yhwh emphasises his concerns for the female character and describes his feelings as surpassing the love of a mother for her child (49:15). A sign of his commitment is the gathering of Zion's builders (49:18: כלם נקבצו באו־לך),[28] who will return to the female and whom Zion shall wear like bridal ornaments—the oracle clearly plays with marriage metaphors and suggests Zion's reinstatement as a wife. When Zion marvels at this unexpected reproductive success, as she had considered herself barren and "exiled" (49:21: וגלמודה גלה),[29] the returning people are revealed to be the second generation of exiles (Duhm [1892] 1968, p. 375; Steck 1992b, pp. 48–49; Goldingay 2005, p. 389). They have been born and raised by the nations, who will bring them to Zion in a procession of pilgrimage (49:22: והביאו בניך בחצן ובנתיך על־כתף תנשאנה). The idea is further developed in the Zion chapter Isa 60 that quotes 49:18 and similarly describes how the Zion children shall return as part of the nations' migration to the city (60:4).

The personification of Zion as a female in these prophecies allows for a double identification.[30] The audience will not only empathize with the female's plight and her reacceptance into the marital status (49:18), but they can also identify with the children that return to their mother. The image of being gathered into the family circle evokes strong feelings of belonging and thus fosters resilience. Considering that the oracles originally addressed a historical audience that was at least one generation removed from the destruction of Jerusalem, the authors establish an emotional bond and create a literary home that can be inhabited by the readership. The later continuation in 43:5–7 similarly endows a sense of belonging and creates identity. The focus here is on Israel that is scattered in the worldwide diaspora and thus envisages an audience that is even further removed from the generation of the Babylonian exile.[31] In this oracle, the prophetic speaker continues an assurance to the people who are addressed by the name of the patriarch Jacob-Israel (43:1). Yhwh promises to bring back and gather together his offspring from all points of the compass (43:5: אני ממזרח אביא זרעך וממערב אקבצך). First, the reference to the patriarch Jacob recalls the Genesis narratives and offers a pre-set identity that the addresses in the diaspora can inhabit. They can relate to Jacob's precarious existence in a foreign country, constantly "on the run", and they can appropriate the blessing that God bestows onto this character.[32] Furthermore, the text uses creation language that strengthens the bonds between the God of Israel and his people. It is because Yhwh has created Jacob-Israel that he can claim the people as his own and ask the nations to bring them home from the worldwide diaspora (43:6: הביאי בני מרחוק ובנותי מקצה הארץ). Thus, resilience in the oracles of gathering and homecoming is primarily a discourse on belonging and identity that fosters the attachment between Yhwh and his people, who are still far from Zion.

My final group of texts uses classic Exodus terminology to describe migration and return, namely the Hebrew verbs עלהand יצא.[33] This set of materials comprises the oracles in Isa 48:20, 52:11–12, and 11:11–16. While these texts address a wider range of adversities, they share in that they refer to Yhwh's previous deliverance in the Exodus events in order to foster resilience.[34] The first oracle is the short call in 48:20 that belongs to the oldest prophecies in Second Isaiah.[35] It starts from a two-part call to a group second person plural to go out from Babylon and flee from Chaldea (48:20: צאו מבבל ברחו מכשדים). Further summons to spread the good news culminate in the call to declare with joy that Yhwh has redeemed his servant Jacob (48:20: גאל יהוה עבדו יעקב). This oracle stimulates actualisation of past salvation, as the verb יצאrecalls the first Exodus, when Yhwh led his people out of Egypt. However, the liberation in Second Isaiah can be understood as an act of empowerment, as the people are not led out (יצאhiphil), but they are called to go out (יצאqal). The redemption of the people takes shape in their being enabled to migrate from Babylon under their own steam. The later oracle in 52:11–12[36] similarly comprises a double call to go out "from there" (52:11: צאו משם), referring to Babylon. Yet the author precedes this call with the double plural imperative סורו סורו. The Hebrew verb סורhas the basic mean-

ing "to turn aside, deviate" and can acquire a moral or ritual qualification (Snijders 2000, pp. 199–207). Its use in the oracle 52:11–12 describes the migration of the people as an act of self-purification—they are supposed to carry the holy vessels with them and thus avoid any defilation (Watts 2021, p. 776). Similar to the first Exodus, Yhwh will lead and guard the procession of his people (Isa 52:12; see Exod 13:21). Further assurances impart purpose and reliability by suggesting that the second Exodus will be an organised business: The prophetic speaker in Isa 52:11 promises that the people shall go out "not in haste nor in flight" (כי לא בחפזון תצאו ובמנוסה לא תלכון). This description is a noted difference to the first Exodus from Egypt, which required the people to eat in haste (Exod 12:11: ואכלתם אתו בחפזון), and leave in flight (Deut 16:3: כי בחפזון יצאת מארץ מצרים).[37] Thus, in terms of resilience, the oracle Isa 52:11–12 continues the empowerment of the people that had already started in 48:20 and strengthens the connections with the first Exodus from Egypt. What is new is the idea that Yhwh's people are separated by a specific state of purity that they need to preserve.

Finally, the late redactional bridge in 11:11–16[38] continues the interpretation of migration and return in the colours of a second Exodus. This oracle focuses, however, on the diaspora in Assyria and Egypt that has not yet returned home (11:11) (Steck 1985, p. 64). For their sake, Yhwh will raise his hand "a second time" (11:11: יוסיף אדני שנית ידו) and gather his remaining people from the four corners of the earth (11:12: יקבץ מארבע כנפות הארץ). The promise assumes that the people shall wear the same footwear as when they departed from Egypt (11:15: נעל; see Exod 12:11), and that there will be a highway (מסלה) "as there was on the day when Israel came up from the land of Egypt" (11:16: ביום עלתו מארץ מצרים). The references prove the prophecy in Isa 11 as sort of a hybrid, as it combines the motif of gathering with the return on a highway that features in the first set of our texts. However, the decisive source of resilience is the activation of the Exodus memory that places the ancient audience in a relational network with the biblical Exodus generation and offers a pre-set identity that the readership can inhabit.

3.2. A Theology of Homecoming

Through the lens of resilience, the theology of homecoming in the book of Isaiah represents a compelling resilience discourse that responds to the adversities of exile and diaspora. Central is the return of Yhwh to royal reign in Zion (52:7–10) that marks the irreversible inset of salvation. The return of the God of Israel foreshadows the return of his people and consequently, in 48:20, the exiles are empowered to leave from Babylonian captivity. The subsequent history of theology sees the development of two ideas of return: First, the Zion continuations start a discussion about gathering and homecoming of the exiles (49:14–26; 60:1–4). This discourse fosters the connections between Israel in exile and their God, and promotes homecoming, which is developed further in 43:5–7. Second, another group of texts draws on the Exodus allusion in 48:20 and paints migration from Babylon in the colours of the first Exodus from Egypt (52:11–12; 11:11–16). The connection with Yhwh's previous salvation action anchors the exile generation in a relational network and creates a meaningful identity for the audience. Finally, the extended vision in Isa 35 represents the core piece of homecoming. In a vision of Yhwh's theophany, the author describes the transformation of land and people, and envisions the people's return on the way of holiness. The utopian characteristics of this vision and the new quality of holiness mark this model of homecoming as an alternative view on reality that tames adversities and fosters agency. Overall, the idea of migration and return in the book of Isaiah changes from concrete perspectives for the Babylonian exile to eschatological hopes. In this form, the prophecies offer a literary home for their historic audiences—the readership is called to identify with the adversities of being far from Zion, dispersed and isolated. The texts foster resilience in evoking acts of thinking, believing, and imagining, and thus allow the audiences to connect with Yhwh and inhabit the literary identity of his people.

4. Through the Lens of Resilience

To sum up, this argument has made a case for considering Hebrew Scripture theology through the lens of resilience theory. There is some overlap with the well-established trauma discourse, but resilience provides a better fit with a descriptive approach. Used as a hermeneutical framework, the implementation of resilience theory considers the history of theology in the Hebrew writings against their setting in times of continuing crisis; it follows processes of adaptation and transformation, and focuses on the resources to cope.

There remains, however, the question, on what level of the text resilience is constituted and who benefits from it. What I have shown in the prophecies of return in the book of Isaiah is a literary performance of resilience for an intended audience. The texts foster identity and agency of the God of Israel and his people in *the world of the text*—in the narrated time. It would be misleading to assign therapeutic impact to these writings or assume that they reflect an accurate picture of historical Israel in post-exilic times. In the same way that we should not diagnose the ancient authors with post-traumatic stress disorder, not all Israelites in the Babylonian or Persian period suffered from identity loss or experienced their living situation as precarious and threatening. Rather, what is at stake here is the vulnerability of a religious belief system that collapsed with the loss of traditional identity markers at the end of the sixth century and was in constant crisis during the following periods. The history of theology in the Hebrew Scriptures attests to a reconfiguration of the central statements of faith—words of God—that fostered first of all the (cultural) resilience of a religious community and in the long run succeeded in establishing biblical Judaism. As such, the affiliation to this community that based themselves on the scriptural texts was certainly beneficial for the individual believer. It is, however, a mediated resilience that was only available as the collective resilience of the people that believed in Yhwh, the God who would lead his people home.

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Notes

1 I have chosen the term "Hebrew Scripture theology" over "Old Testament theology" to indicate that the object of my study are the scriptural writings that gradually formed the Jewish Bible, before they were transmitted as the first part of the Christian Bible.

2 See the definition by James Barr: "The term 'biblical theology' has clarity only when it is understood to mean theology as it existed or was thought or believed within the time, languages and cultures of the Bible itself" (Barr 1999, p. 4).

3 On the history of research, see Schmid (2015, pp. 5–47).

4 See, for example, Stendahl (1962); a concise discussion offers Collins ([1990] 2005).

5 Similarly Stendahl (1962, p. 422): "This history of interpretation is woven into the very fabric of the biblical texts themselves". On the formation of the Hebrew Bible see Kratz (2008); Carr (2011), and Schmid (2012).

6 See the contributions in the volume *Religionsgeschichte Israels oder Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Baldermann [1995] 2001).

7 See, for example, Kratz (2002, pp. 310–26); Schmid (2011, pp. 243–62).

8 Thus the influential essay by Jon Levenson, "Why Jews are not Interested in Biblical Theology" (Levenson [1987] 1993). See, however, the contributions by Sommer (2009), and Rom-Shiloni (2016).

9 Similarly, John Collins comes to the conclusion that "historical criticism remains the most satisfactory context for biblical theology" (Collins [1990] 2005, p. 22), while Konrad Schmid formulates the need "to maintain a degree of historical analysis when approaching 'theological' questions" (Schmid 2015, p. 46).

10 Barr (1999, p. 607): "historical quantifier, epressed by the very rough formula of biblical times and cultures".

11 For a concise overview, see Schipper (2021).

12 On this criticism, see Dietrich (2022, pp. 69–71).

13 The terminology goes back to Caruth (1996). On the discussion see also Janzen (2019), who cautions against failing to distinguish between the psychological and the sociological understanding of trauma in the study of the Hebrew Bible.

14 On the differentiation between trauma studies and the resilience discourse, see also the introduction of *Resilienznarrative im Alten Testament*, edited by Judith Gärtner and Cornelia Richter (Gärtner and Richter 2022). The articles collected in this volume demonstrate through different methodological approaches, how the resilience discourse can be used fruitfully in reading the Hebrew Bible.

15 Ground-breaking proved the longitudinal study by American psychologist Emmy E. Werner on a group of children on the Hawaiian island of Kauai (1971–1982); on a summary of her findings see Werner (1993).

16 On this emphasis, see Gärtner and Richter (2022, pp. 7–9).

17 Surprisingly few studies focus on the motif of return in the book of Isaiah; the topic is usually discussed within the wider context of exile, see e.g., Rom-Shiloni (2021), or the contributions on Isaiah in Stökl and Waerzeggers (2015). However, a significant topic in the history of scholarship proved the idea of return in terms of a second or new Exodus in Second Isaiah, see FN 34. For a study of the motif of return in the other two Major Prophets, the books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, see Lust (1981).

18 On the redactional framing function of Isa 40:1–5 and 52:7–10, see Kratz (1991, pp. 168–74).

19 For a classic description of temple theology, see Steck (1972, p. 9); further Ollenberger (1987), and Hartenstein (1997).

20 On the Ancient Near Eastern background of the motif of Yhwh's return in Second Isaiah, see Ehring (2007); with regard to the related idea of Yhwh's departure and return in the Book of Ezekiel, see Bodi (1991), and Kutsko (2000).

21 Similarly Westermann (1969, pp. 251–52), and Ehring (2007, p. 75). The two aorist forms in the LXX of Isa 52:9 (ὅτι ἠλέησεν κύριος αὐτὴν καὶ ἐρρύσατο Ιερουσαλημ) similarly reflect the idea of salvation action that has already taken place: "because the Lord has shown mercy to her and has delivered Jerusalem".

22 Ulrich Berges takes the suffixed address of the people as a sign that the covenant relationship is restored in Isa 40:1, thus strengthening the emphasis on election (see Berges 2008, pp. 98–99). Similarly, Oswalt (1998, p. 49), notes "the language of the covenant" in Isa 40:1.

23 On the role of emotions to build up resilience, see Katherine M. Hockey's study on 1 Peter (Hockey 2020).

24 The chapter has been recognised as a redactional link between First and Second Isaiah, see comprehensively Steck 1985. From a more intertextual perspective, see Hagelia (2006).

25 Scholarship is divided on the redactional assessment of the parallel formulation in 51:11/35:10. While Duhm (Duhm [1892] 1968, p. 257), considered 51:11 an addition taken from 35:10, more recent voices suggest that both verses belong to the same literary layer (see e.g., Steck 1992a, p. 89). Considering that the vision in Isa 35 represents a more detailed picture and offers an interpretation of the way (51:10) in terms of the way of holiness (35:8), I want to suggest that 35:10 draws on 51:11.

26 According to Claus Sedmak, alternate or even utopian views on reality by acts of thinking and imagining foster resilience, as humans free themselves from present realities and develop a scope of action, see Sedmak (2013, pp. 232–33).

27 On term and concept, see Steck (1992b).

28 The versions reflect different ideas on who are the subjects of the "gathering" in 49:18. The MT reads בניך("your sons") in 49:17, which fits better with the context, but the more unusual reading of the "builders" in 1QIsa[a] ((בוניךthat finds support in the variants of Aquila, Theodotion and the Vulgate, can be suggested to be preferable (thus with Watts 2021, p. 740).

29 Poignantly, Goldingay and Payne (2006, p. 192), observe: "For a moment they [the words in V 21] abandon the metaphor of motherhood and bereavement for literal description of the community's experience".

30 On this function of the female personification, see Steck (1992c). See further Biddle (1991, pp. 173–94); Wischnowsky (2001), and Maier (2008).

31 On the historic setting in a diaspora context, see Kratz (1991, pp. 139–40); similarly, Kiesow (1979, p. 110); Berges (2012, p. 323).

32 Berges 2008, p. 276, also comments on the typological use of the name of the patriarch in Isa 43 that he considers a realisation ("Vergegenwärtigung") of Jacob-Israel for the present diaspora.

33 On the significance of these two verbs for the Exodus tradition, see Berner (2018); older scholarship is summarised by Groß (1974).

34 The idea of a second or new Exodus has proved an influential thesis in scholarship; see, for example, Kiesow (1979); Fishbane (1979); Barstad (1989); Lund (2007); Klein (2015).

35 With regard to the assessment of 48:20–21, see Kratz (1991, p. 216); Steck (1992b, pp. 114–17, 125); with regard to 48:20, see Klein (2015, 286–88).

36 On the literary assessment, see Kratz (1991, pp. 107–8).

37 See Klein (2015, pp. 283–84). The links with Exod 12:11 (and Deut 16:3) are also noted by Duhm (Duhm [1892] 1968, p. 393); Kiesow (1979, p. 118); Fishbane (1979, p. 134), and Oswalt (1998, p. 372).

38 On the literary assessment, see Steck (1985, pp. 62–63).

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