



Kiefer, Jörn

Exil und Diaspora: Begrifflichkeit und Deutungen im antiken Judentum und in der hebräischen Bibel

Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 19

Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005. Pp. 760 + CD-ROM. Hardcover. €88.00. ISBN 3374023169.

Klaus-Peter Adam
Philipps-Universität Marburg
Marburg, Germany

The intention of Kiefer's study is to develop an understanding of the terms and interpretations for exile and diaspora in the Hebrew Bible and in ancient Judaism, focusing on relevant biblical and early Jewish texts up to the second century C.E. Kiefer's book provides a most readable and a stimulating companion to everyone working on exile and diaspora, indicating the shifts in interpretation of these historical facts and displaying the strong links of biblical to postbiblical texts and interpretations.

Kiefer challenges the common scholarly view that understands the representation of diaspora as mainly a curse and a punishment; more precisely, he opposes the following assumptions: (1) Jewish life outside of Israel was mainly the result of the Babylonian exile; life outside of Israel was inferior; (2) exile is God's punishment; returning to Israel is God's reward; and (3) the acceptance of the diaspora is a form of assimilation (25–26).

In chapter 1 (25–106) Kiefer challenges traditional theological and historiographical terminology. He rejects "exile" and "diaspora" as inappropriate for historians to use (esp. 42–47). He supports this argument by claiming that only a small part of the population in the sixth century B.C.E. had experienced the exile. Likewise, "diaspora" contains a judgment on a "center" as opposed to "periphery" (44). Exile as a form of forced flight

from the country and diaspora as a freely chosen form of emigration are thus understood as complementary terms covering the same phenomenon in Israelite history. While maintaining the relationship with their home country, a large part of the Jewish people lived outside the country. In order to explain the historical background, Kiefer presents the deportations during the Neo-Assyrian and the Neo-Babylonian periods and the return of the Israelites in the Persian era (47–106).

Chapters 2 (107–229) and 3 (230–436) consist mainly of in-depth word studies on גלה, שבה, and other important roots in the semantic field of “scattering”; פוץ/נפץ; דחה/נדח; and פזר/זרה in the relevant Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek sources. On the basis of comprehensive charts and detailed descriptions, Kiefer deals with the relevant roots and their implicit value judgments. The study provides a reference work on the biblical and postbiblical evidence, providing more detailed overviews on the verbs in the CD-ROM attached to the book.

For example, גלה according to Kiefer suggests a neutral meaning of “loss” or “disappear/vanish” (119), which only in the specific historical situation of the exile had a negative undertone. The originally rather neutral term of movement expressed the loss of the people leaving the country (225). The special meaning of “leaving the homeland (for exile)” is, according to the author, secondary and was imposed on the verb in the specific contexts of eighth-century mass deportations. In fifteen occurrences in the *qal* it is not yet understood as a technical term for “deportation” (Judg 18:30; 2 Kgs 17:23; 24:14; 25:21// Jer 52:27; Jer 1:3; Amos 1:5; 5:5; 6:7 [bis]; 7:11 [bis], 17 (bis) [p. 123]), whereas גלה *hiphil* has the meaning of a military action, that is, a deportation, especially for the Neo-Assyrian and the Neo-Babylonian deportations (125). The causative *hiphil* form and הלך/יצא בגולה were standard idioms for these deportations. According to Kiefer, it is remarkable that soon after these events they were already used with positive connotations (225).

To these investigations on the biblical Hebrew Kiefer adds the postbiblical evidence. For example, גלה used for different forms of migratory movements, even within Israel and in postbiblical times, lost its character as a punishment (226). גלות had no negative connotations and was a neutral term for “move.” More specifically, it was used in rabbinic literature as a technical term for exile in the asylum city caused by unwilling homicide.

Chapter 3 offers a close look at the context of the interpretations of exile and diaspora in the Second Temple period. It focuses on the interpretations of exile and diaspora in postbiblical Hebrew and Aramaic literature. Kiefer suggests seven new categories for interpreting exile and diaspora in biblical texts (432): (1) exile and diaspora as God’s judgment; (2) the overall presence of exile and emigration as an unavoidable historical

reality and a lamentable destiny of an oppressed and weaker people; (3) the return to the land of Israel or the gathering of the scattered people in pre-Hellenistic literature; (4) the return to the land of Israel as an eschatological turning point; (5) the acceptance of a parallel existence of the land of Israel and of the diaspora; (6) God's presence and care and a blessed life in both exile and in the diaspora; and (7) a universal meaning of the diaspora. According to Kiefer's reading, Jewish life outside the land of Israel was widely accepted. Living abroad was not less esteemed than living in the land of Israel, since it was possible to practice religion abroad. Such a judgment presupposes God's presence outside of Israel, as does God's eschatological gathering (category 4). Kiefer states that a multiplicity of understandings of the exile existed at the time. A patriotic feeling for a local diaspora community would not necessarily have excluded an intense contact between Jews in the communities of the diaspora and the land of Israel (436).

Chapter 4 (437–695) repeats and partly deepens much of the analysis offered in the previous chapters, commenting on all the occurrences of the relevant verbs within their contexts. One of the major arguments developed in this chapter is that often the hope of restoration and gathering of all Israel formed part of an eschatological framework of God's history with his people. The majority of the descriptions in Jeremiah and Ezekiel suggest to Kiefer more a universal salvific turnpike than a historical return to Israel (691).

In addition, Kiefer points out positive aspects of exile and diaspora in biblical texts, such as the exile's function to make humans aware how much they do in fact depend on God (see Lev 26:40; Deut 4:30; 30:2; 1 Kgs 8:47–48; Ezek 20:33–38; category 6). Also, the exile could be understood as a pedagogic act of God (Jer 30:11//46:28). The metaphor of "winnowing" could be used to describe God's people as purified (e.g., Ezek 20:23; 22:15; 36:19).

The exile seen in a universal perspective in the biblical texts is not understood as a punishment but rather as a revelatory act of salvation, opening the eyes not only of Israel but also of the Gentiles (693). The positive aspects of exile and diaspora in biblical texts are unlike Philo's and Josephus's interpretation, are never isolated, and instead are always combined with other categories of interpretation. At least from the Persian period onward, the diaspora was seen as a shaping event in Israel's history and, eventually, became the most important event in Jewish history (694).

The strengths of Kiefer's book are his discussions of the manifold interpretations of exile and diaspora. He highlights positive aspects of these events that are irreducible to assimilation but likewise are rooted in the Hebrew Bible itself. Kiefer's lexicographic studies of some of the terms for exile and diaspora thus offer an important contribution

to current scholarship. Also, the comprehensive charts and overviews on the CD and in the book are most helpful.

Less convincing are Kiefer's seven categories of the interpretation of exile and diaspora in Hellenistic and Roman texts (432). They concern different levels of interpretations of exile and diaspora. The understanding of the exile as God's judgment (1) or the idea of an overall presence of exile and emigration as an unavoidable historical reality (2) apparently evolve from different intentions of different sorts of texts. Category 6 (God's presence in exile and diaspora) is somehow related to these two categories, whereas categories 3–5 concern the notion of time of exile and diaspora. The reference to the exile as a historical preexilic event (3), as an eschatological/future event (4), or as an enduring accepted present situation (5) are in some ways on the same level. The seventh category, the universal meaning of the diaspora, does not necessarily exclude categories 1–6. Kiefer's categories of the interpretation of exile and diaspora thus offer explanations to different questions of Jewish communities, whereas the listing of them as 1–7 suggests that they answer similar questions. Also, the interpretations given in 1–7 seem to be linked to specific forms and sorts of texts.

On the level of methodology, the investigation takes a rather uncommon approach, beginning with the notion of exile and diaspora in the Hellenistic-Roman period and proceeding to biblical times. Generally, this challenges the usual perspective of biblical scholarship. However, since the Assyrian and Babylonian deportations serve as the historical paradigm for exile and diaspora, as is rightly pointed out (47–106), the semantic study ought to follow the same logic. Any diachronic perspective on the Hebrew roots would thus consequently have to develop from the paradigmatic historical accounts, such as the Neo-Babylonian exile and the Neo-Assyrian deportations as the historical background of *גלה* *hiphil* (123, 125; cf. 449–59 on 2 Kgs 15:29; 16:9; 17:6, 27, 28; 18:11; 17:23, 26, 33). A start from these historic events is necessary, since sometimes the exile is only alluded to but not mentioned explicitly (e.g., 126; cf. Jer 22:12; Amos 1:6; 1 Chr 8:6.7).

Finally, the lexicographical material of chapters 2–4 might have been presented in a more condensed form, and the results of chapter 4 might have been integrated into chapter 2.